

i

magazine

A Literary Arts Journal



Spring 2006



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i magazine

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i magazine

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Guest Poet:
Professor David Patterson

We Choose the Fuel We Be

One log smolders slowly, groans and sulks,
Ahiss among the sputters of the sap;
Its smoke ascends in vapid grey till folks
Must poke the plodding wood with prod and tap.
Another's flame jumps quickly forth with sprightly
Yellow tips of dancing tongues to cast
A glare around the room, a lantern lightly
Fighting gloom when slightest warmth has passed.
A third stick, dense and dry, burns fierce and deep:
Its torrid embers orange emit a heat
Intent with inner blazing light to sweep
A world awake to eager life complete.
The fire of life consumes us till our death;
We choose the fuel we be till final breath.

The Ferns

Kristie Rines

I'm outside playing in the grass and looking for dandelions so I can play "Mama had a baby and its head popped off." The grass must to go up to my ankles closer to my shins, or at least it seems that way. The grass is still wet from the rain, it's getting my frilly lace socks with the pink ribbon all wet. The ribbon weaves in and out of the cotton, so when they are folded down, it hangs over the icky part of the sock. They lightly touch my favorite black buckled dress shoes. Mommy would be certainly mad if she sees that I have sneaked them out of the house. But I couldn't help it, they were so pretty, and not only that, dolly told me it was ok. My shoes are only for church. I hate church and sitting in the pews. Guess what? I know why they are called pews. It's because they stink that's why. So whenever I have to go to church I always say pee-you. I also hate it, because I can't talk to dolly, or we both get yelled at. It's always her fault, she never shuts up, so I always get into trouble because of her.

Now my dress is dirty too. It has bright red roses on it, and it has a big white bow that ties in the back. The bottom of it is all wet and soggy. Don't you dare think that I have pee-pee in my pants or anything. I'm a big girl and big girls don't pee in their pants, only babies and old people pee in their pants, and I'm not a baby and I'm not old either. So there! Just so you know, I'm sticking out my tongue out at you. I have mud

smudges all over the pretty roses, and stuck all over my shoes and socks are strands of grass. This is because Howie has mowed the grass. Howie is mommy's boy friend. I like him a lot!

He's very, very nice. He always lets me help push the mower, even though mommy says I'll get hurt if I help. I like it when he ignores her. He also lets me have ice cream when she's not home. He's fun and dolly likes him too. So we decided that he could stay. There have been times when we have played pranks on some of mommy's other boy friends, like that time dolly told me to put glue in the lock that makes that car go, or the other time we put one of their tooth brushes into the toilet bowl. We did these types of things only when they made mommy cry. It was fun making them mad. Not only that they would go away if I were patient enough, and I put them through enough of my special tricks. Mommy says I'm not very patient "He, he, he," only if she knew. So now I'm all dirty and bath time is going to be coming much sooner than I was hoping for. Baths are yucky I always get soap in my eyes, or toys poking me in the butt it's no fun at all. I like being dirty, but mommy thinks little girls should be clean. Sometimes I don't think she's very smart. Being dirty is much better.

Now I'm swinging on my swing with dolly in my lap. Happily singing "Little Bonny Fu-Fu hopping through the forest, chasing all the field mice, and bopping them on the head." The bugs even seem to be giant-like when you're my age. My legs are pumping, and pushing the air so I go higher and higher. My belly gets weak when I start to go backwards, I think I'm gonna throw up. I slow myself down because dolly is afraid I'm gonna puke on her, and she really doesn't want a bath today either. So I stop. I can see that mommy is on the phone. She's been on there since I came outside. Boy oh boy!

She has been talking for a long time. I know that it is someone she isn't very happy with, because every now and then, she said very, very, very bad words. You know the kind that she told me she'd put soap in my mouth for. You know the "F" word. She is being very naughty, I almost get off of my swing just to tell her that, but she is angry and I don't like mommy much when she is angry. I can hear her saying "Are you out of your fucking mind, you haven't seen them since Janine was born."

I get off my swing, and get closer so I can hear better. Not that I'm eavesdropping, that's what mommy calls it, or she says, "I am a nosey little shit." I don't want to disappoint her. So here I am right under the windowsill where she can't see me. I can hear a man on the other end screaming at the top of his lungs at her. Little do I know at that moment, my mommy is on the phone with my daddy and my other grandma who I don't know. They are trying to get her to let my sister and me go for a two-week visit for the summer. My grandma must have talked her into it, because the next thing I know mommy is trying to talk me into going on a long trip. "But mommy I don't wanna go!" I scream at the top of my lungs. I can tell she's now trying to be patient with me, but she is the one who doesn't have much patience to tell you the truth. "Your daddy wants to see you honey," she's explaining to me. "I- DON'T - WANNA -GO!" I scream even louder. "Oh really why don't you want to go?" she asks. "I don't wanna to be away from you mommy," I say very sadly. Tears rolling down my eyes. That usually works with her. So I keep them flowing, now even harder.

She is trying to comfort me, by hugging me. I wiggle just so she thinks that I don't like it. Don't tell her but I really do like it. I can smell her perfume and the Dove bar soap she

uses. If I breathe in hard enough, I can even smell the Tide laundry soap we put in the wash. I know these things, because mommy is teaching me how to read and I help her put everything into the shopping cart. When we are at the grocery store, when we are in the fruit aisle, I always sneak a handful of the purple grapes and I shove them in my mouth. So I look like a squirrel, I watch them in the back yard when I play. Boy oh boy, they can put lots in their mouths. Just so you know, she never catches me. Shhh. Don't tell, she'd get awfully mad at me. "Janine, this will give you a chance to meet your daddy, and your brother and other sisters." Wide-eyed. "I have a brother and other sisters?" She's nodding at me, "Yes sweetie you do." Puzzled. "Are you their mommy too?" Now mommy has this real sad look on her face "Only to your brother," she replies. Confused I ask her "Why doesn't he live here, here with us?" Now mommy's crying, too. "Someday when you are old enough to understand, I'll tell you." I hate it when she says that, but I know not to push my luck, because I hate seeing her cry. So now I fling my arms around her neck "I love you mommy." She pulls me away from her, she's looking at me, then her gaze turns down to the ground and then back up at me. "I love you too sweetie, but now you need to take a bath."

The next day we leave, I'm in the back seat of our big black car, on our way to New York. That's where mommy says we are going. I love the back seat, every time we hit a bump, I almost hit my head on the top of the ceiling, and it's big enough for me and for dolly. What did you think, I was going to forget her? You must be craaaazy! I don't go anywhere without her. Plus it would have made her very sad if I left her at home. "Mommy." She looks at me through the rearview mirror "Yes Janine," she replies. "Are we there yet?" I can hear the biggest sigh come out of her body. Almost as loud as when

she farts. "Mommy, are we there yet?" Frustrated. "Why don't you and your dolly take a nappy, we are going to be in the car for a while." Before she can look in the rearview mirror again, dolly and I are fast asleep.

"Hello," I'm back. I'm still stuck in the back seat of mommy's car. Now I'm sweating my ass off in the early summer heat. Oops! I shouldn't have said that, I could get into big trouble for that one. I wonder what daddy will be like. Will he like me? I sure hope so. I don't think he likes me. He has never sent no birthday cards, no Christmas presents, no calls, no letters not a thing! Now all of a sudden, I'm on an eight-hour car ride to see this asshole. Oh no! I did it again. Mommy says he's a bastard. Does that make me one too? Whatever that is. I sure hope not. It seems to me that all my friends have dads but I don't. I think that this is my chance to see him.

We arrive and I feel that I have arrived too. There he is! There is my daddy! He's very tall, but I think he's way too skinny. He reminds me of a piece of spaghetti. You know before it's cooked. His face is covered with hair. It tickles when he gives me a kiss. Actually it's kinda itchy too. To be honest I really don't like his furry face. When I first hug him, when he hugs me back, he scares me. Not in the sense that I am afraid of what he thinks of me, or of him not loving me. But the type of being afraid that comes when you're walking though where dead people are buried, on the night you go trick or treating. The moon is full and at any moment the dead bodies are going to come out of the ground, like zombies and they attack you. Also like when the boogey that hides underneath your bed is going to eat you if you fall asleep. That's how I feel. He makes me want to go back into the car and lock myself in. Not only that, but dolly is afraid too. She tells me to be careful, and not to trust him.

The ferns are tall here and the smell of them so sweet. It's very, very dark during the night; the stars seem like they couldn't get any brighter. Fireflies fill the darkness, and the glow worms light the ground. There are so many of both that you can fill an entire jar. That's exactly what I do. Me, dolly, my sisters and my brother. I like my sisters and brother. They are very nice! We have lots of fun playing, and singing. We catch fireflies all night. We put them in jars and we use it to light our way, like a flashlight. Until they die. Then all you're left with is a bunch of dried out shells that used to talk by flashing their lights. That makes me very sad, that they don't live for long. We forgot to poke holes in the tops of the jars. They died, just like everything else around here.

I have been here for a long time now. It seems like forever to me. Way too long as far as I'm concerned. I miss mommy. I miss the way she combs my hair with the big brush and the way she cuts the crust off my sandwiches. Meanie (that's what dolly calls my step-mommy), she doesn't cut off my crust. I don't like her very much. She smells like beer and so does daddy. I don't like him either. I really don't think either one of them brush their teeth. Seeing that there is no tooth brushes in the bathroom. See dolly and I were going to give her one of our special tricks. But we couldn't find any toothbrushes so we had to come up with a different plan. So we took all her underwear and hid it in the woods. I'm not sure if she's noticed yet. Her armpits are stinky, too. Dolly keeps on asking me, when we were going to go home. I kept on telling her "I don't know" and she kept on asking "why." I can see why that bugs mommy so much, because now dolly is bugging me. "Why, why, why?" That's all she keeps on saying, when I tell

her I don't know. I keep on wondering, when I am going to be able to go back home?

I decide to go play outside. Over by the wood stack, where one of the cats we have, had just several days before, given birth to her litter of kittens. I am so excited! Kittens! I love kittens! They are my favorite. But they are hiding on me. They are hiding in the wood stack and I am trying really, really hard to get a peek of them. I think I can see a black one, oh there's a gray and white one. Look at him, at least I think it's a him. But I won't know for sure, until I get my hands on one. One, two, three, four, five! Oh boy there's five of them. I can't wait for them to come out and play with me. I think I'll call the back one blackie, the striped one tiger, the gray and white one fluffy. Oh no dolly's getting jealous! She wants to name them too. Ok dolly you can name the other two prince and princess. I'm trying so hard to reach in. Just so I can touch one of them. Their fur is so soft. Not like dog hair. Don't get me wrong, I like doggies too, but kittens, they are way cuter than puppies.

I can hear voices coming from the house. At first they are just loud, but then it has turned into screaming. My daddy is screaming at my stepmother and she's screaming at him. I wish I had a bar of soap in my hands. They both are being very naughty. I can hear glass breaking. I think daddy threw a glass against the wall, or maybe at her. Then all I can hear is the sound of her skin being hit. Oh my God daddy is hitting her. Her cries are being carried over the wind, like when a wolf cries into the night. Whispering. "Dolly do you think we should run?" As I'm peeing my pants. "Dolly I-I-I I'm scared!" If you have never heard someone being beaten before, it makes an awful thudding noise, when his fists makes contact to her body. I can hear him saying "Next time, I catch you fucking cooking something, that I told you not to, I'm going to take my

gun, and shove it up your ass, you fucking bitch." Then the sliding glass door flings open, and he makes his way down the stairs. I'm standing here crying, and I'm stuck here. My feet won't move no matter how much I tell them to. I'm like a deer in an open field. I never saw or heard a man beat a woman. Sure my mother had boyfriends, yes they fought, but they never hit her. My daddy sees me staring at him.

He comes running over to me, like a cheetah ready to pounce on his prey. His eyes wild "What the fuck are you staring at?" He says. Now he is about two inches away from my face. "I'm just looking at the kittens, daddy." He's grinning. "Oh you are, are you?"

Then in one swift moment, he takes his foot and kicks over most of the woodpile. Crushing all of my tiny kittens that are hiding underneath. It makes such a crunching sound, that I puke all over myself. He has killed blackie, tiger, fluffy, prince and princess. That asshole killed them all! I start to scream as loud as I can. "I hate you!" "I hate you!" He grabs me by the hair, and drags me into the house. He is now beating me with a wooden cutting board. He is hitting me over and over again. It burns my skin. He is hitting me all over my body. I'm thinking he's going to kill me. My sister Fay comes in and now his rage turns on to her. Somehow I managed to get away from him seeing he has a new body to beat on. I run out of the house and into the woods, where I hide myself in the ferns, the smell of them so sweet. But then I see that I have forgotten my dolly.

The 94th Thesis

Scott Gallant

Wrangled under the concealing spruce tree
lips mashed together and bodies aligned perfectly
communicatively speaking

Coated bodies of sweat, promise, and esoteric movements
mostly water, electrolytes, and our magnetically drawn
spirits
*written eloquently like religious texts upon skin...this sacred
geometry*

My Sabbath was kept holy this Sunday

What I Learned From Dying

Scott Gallant

My lifeless body beneath me
Torn fabric of space-time above me
The Vast Empty...more frightening
Than astronomy could ever gauge

Most beautiful haze of green glow beckoning
Welcoming gateway, intuitively speaking
This mortal coil...not yet severed
Fraying from the stress of indecision

How did it come to this?

Fetal memories beget death-wish tendencies
Posterity demons plague DNA legacies
Sweetest psilocin...in heroic doses
Compounded with esoteric inquiry

Scratch the surface of an aimless hedonist
Discover a wretched fool frightened beneath
In ten hours time...twelve bardos compile
My heart's weight in this soul-seek tribunal

Why have I returned?

As with ecstasy comes tragedy, experience both
proudly

Name your poison, your price...choose your payment

Just depart gracefully and appreciate each breath

Why repeat that same tired damnation?

Greyrock, Uxbridge

Scott Gallant

An abandoned Victorian-style mansion
converted to house the lost, demented and brain-fevered
A tranquil serenity its outer shell
cushioned lounges
dining areas
greenhouses and suppressant medications

Beneath its candy-coated rehabilitations
belies the doppelganger underbelly
A dungeon for discarded guinea pigs
sensory-deprivation chambers
Solitary confinements
leather strap restraints and electro-shock devices

Confined to Classic

Scott Gallant

To write in I-am**BIC**-pen**TAM**-e**TER**
My brain must twist and take a rhythmic turn
I can not stress how much this pains me rue
I feel I may just quit before I'm ~~finished with this assignment~~
!!!.....through

I understand the challenges I face
To march the words in step with cadenced grace
I'm sure it proves some kind of poet stake
To compromise the words for meter's sake

But who the Hell is one to claim the case
That ev'ry heart beats at the same ol' pace
Limit the mind to narrow paths and see
Our art will mock our creativity

Though I appreciate the works of past
I find their rules to be a pain-in-ass!!!

Santa Barbara

Caitlin Donahue

Clean air, living-green against
Aquatic blue, warm wind
Rustles your hair
Skin receiving sun,
After endless days of hiding
Dead salt
Soaking your pores
Awaking to golden splayed blanket
Steaming ebony in a cup awaiting
Locals gawking at summer attire
Naïve to the true feeling of cold
Blissfully shuffling along
Vibrant streets
Thrilled you escaped
From the explosion of snow
Back home in the tundra of New England.

Unraveled

Caitlin Donahue

Silence lives in a dark room
No windows or door.
It is always awake
Whispering sharp screams

Silence is untouched snow.
Sparkling and dancing in the moonlight.
Fragile and untainted
It keeps life at a great distance

Silence surrounds me.
Air is thinner and looser.
Sky can open up to me.
Mind can run around freely

Silence, I must tell you,
I feel you should know
I see what is hidden within you

And I see why you make no sound.

Speak

Caitlin Donahue

I asked about the pictures,
She told me, but you don't know
My words won't tell you, but I am aware.
My stare cries for you, unflinching.

Stance is confident,
Yet entrenched in dejection
Giving the illusion, you've never felt loneliness.
Fools gold to distract
Us, from knowing your pain

Ceramic angels on the mantel,
Gum painted cheeks
Her eyes watching from
Behind aging glass
Pain of emotion experienced, so young

Scarred by the tears, mother cried
You will crumble
Someday, I will walk by
The pile of a broken man
And say what was never said.

Dark eyes run so far,

If only I could run along
Beside them, I wonder where they go,
How deep they flee
Maybe it's somewhere no one should ever see

Smiling is the intricate
Floral wallpaper
Distracts from the
Water stained ceiling
Is your soul harmed?

From that young child
Dying in your arms?

Proctor Road

Caitlin Donahue

Lively music buzzing through the auto
Smiles on faces unaware, what's ahead
Slow down, to see a boy is in the road
Don't see what's to my left, only the right
Wave with recognition, face turns white at
Sight of thunderstruck eyes, ears dissipate
From the sounds of what they fear they will hear
Can't turn or my eyes will be burned for life
Blue frenzied lights sprint by, my head snaps back
To watch, stomach sinking, heart sputtering,
I, aware of what may be told to me
If I ask what I'm already thinking
The sky turned dark, the news revealed too soon.
Saw his friend beheaded, the body strewn.

Memento

Caitlin Donahue

Velvety white
Peach-puckered skin.
Two tiny teeth
Born into the gum.

Ocean eyes,
Wispy sand-scattered hair.
Chuckles constantly
Sobs without shyness

Hut-hut.

Worm-wiggles on
Ground to befriend
Bouncy-brown, though she
Walks with wisdom.

Proudly pounds
Her pot belly,
Not yet soured by a
Magazine mimicking nation.

Screams with delight
At sight of the known.

Lips-lovingly brush towards you,
Face to face with the fact

That you matter.

Joan

Angela MacKinnon

Before I moved in, Joan had a fling with the landlord so she got to stay there for free. Now I'm not a genius but I figured out, there's a lot to learn about Joan.

Joan moved away to Colorado the summer after her eighteenth birthday, the summer after high school graduation, the summer after the last straw. It was the summer of 1992.

All through high school Joan made herself invisible, a loner with nothing to say and so much to hide. No one noticed her, except me. Joan and I got on and off that school bus together everyday for four years. We were neighbors. For those four long years, everyday, faithfully, I would say "Hey Joan" and "I'll see you tomorrow, Joan" and everyday for those four long years I got nothing. But I guess it must have made some kind of impact on her because she came to say good-bye the night she left. She said she was running away, she said she'd found God and a boyfriend as well. She said this one was different; he wouldn't hit her or make her feel shallow. And in the back of my mind I realized there was a lot to learn about Joan. She kissed me on the cheek, said thank you and good-bye and took off in the red '89 Ford pickup her father had ordered her never to touch. And as she roared out of our small town I wondered, doubted more like, would I ever set eyes on Joan again?

In early February of 1995 I heard that familiar roar, the roar that had been dormant in the back of my mind for the last three years, the roar that announced her return. Joan came back to Michigan right smack in the middle of our last big snowstorm so needless to say there weren't any visitors staying in the local motor inn. Joan stayed there seeing as how she had no home here. Her father had passed away the year before, of liver failure. The only one to attend his funeral was his wife, though she shed no tears and quickly moved away after his death as if he had been holding her, keeping her from her plans all these years. She left as if this was her only chance to escape. A new family had moved into this house now. A normal family, with their own secrets I'm sure. Since the night Joan arrived in town she only stopped to look at the house once. Only once did she allow herself to go back in time, she had moved on from that life. That's what she said anyhow. However, I'll never know if it was me she was trying to convince or herself.

When Joan came back she was much different than when she left. The awkward, silent teen that dressed solely in black, that hid away from the light was absent. No longer was she a tall, skinny twig of a girl with drab brown hair. She had matured, become a woman, a late blossomer I would assume. Here stood a shapely woman, no longer tall and gangly, but well-rounded. She had dyed her hair a sandy blonde, which made her seem more casual, friendlier. But her eyes still betrayed her. The seemingly permanent violet rings under her eyes, that couldn't be hidden by any amounts of make-up, gave away her inability to sleep. And even deeper in her eyes lay a certain quality, a darkness that you couldn't quite place, a secret that you never could find. She looked much older than

her 21 years, like time, life had already given her much more than asked for.

Some people say I was waiting for Joan to return, some say it was just coincidence, some say nothing at all, only look. Either way, it was only days after she had returned that I knocked on her motel door. Her eyes were cautious, anxious when she opened the door, as if expecting someone else. Reluctantly, she let me inside her room. We chatted casually for an hour or two, mostly polite catching up: what have you been up to, where do you work, are you married, etc. At the end of our visit right before I left I asked if I could see her again. After a moment's careful consideration she said "Sure, call me" and with a quick snap the door was closed.

Joan and I began dating two months later in late March, if you would even call it dating. Often times I wouldn't even hear from Joan for a week or two and then she'd just show up at my house. It was a strange arrangement we had but I enjoyed her company, our weekend excursions, our late nights. She changed my way of thinking if only by the unusual way she ticked. There were the rumors about the landlord and her, but I never asked. I think I was afraid of the answer and really, it was one way to pay the bills.

After nearly a year of dating and traveling back and forth between our apartments I asked Joan to move in with me. A big step I realize but one I thought would bring us closer, get her away from the dingy apartment, and maybe make her realize that I was serious. I was falling for this girl and I couldn't seem to stop it. But I certainly couldn't tell her that, it would have ruined everything. After I popped the question Joan disappeared for three days. I thought for sure she had left town again, but when I came home from work Friday night there she was on my couch as if nothing had changed. She

agreed to move in under one condition: no matter our situation, circumstances, arrangements, relationship, etc. I would not cross that boundary, I wouldn't get too close. She had a certain privacy about herself that she liked to maintain and I wasn't to interrupt that. I must promise to leave her secrets where they were: locked away deep inside of her. I promised without another thought, I figured she'd come around and open up to me in time, no problem. And for a little over a year there weren't any problems. We coexisted without a fight or even a discussion. We were dull, boring, normal. Just what she had always wanted.

I went to the closet to get dressed for work one Tuesday morning. I had a conference that day so I needed my dress shoes which were shoved somewhere in the depths of the closet. While sifting through boxes of shoes, socks and various other clothes I came upon a box I hadn't seen before. It was filled with all kinds of letters to some guy in Colorado from 1994. Now, I know it's wrong but I sat and opened those letters, I had a right to know if she was cheating, didn't I?

The first letter started with "How could you Evan? You promised me more than this..." She yelled at him for the hurtful comments he made. She cursed him for the mark on her face, the wound on her leg. She was mad that she had to hide under sweatshirts and jeans, she was mad she had to lie, she was mad that she had to be alone again for fear of someone finding out. But more than that, she was angry that she had to hurt again.

She went on to talk about blisters and bruises of anger. About how it was getting too bad, how she was getting too deep. About how she'd bought a handgun to learn how to shoot. She described the gun, how it felt in her hands, the

heaviness, the awkwardness. She went on to say how every Thursday she would drive to a shooting range an hour away, where no one knew her, where she could learn without being afraid. Eventually, the heaviness faded, she grew more certain, her aim more precise, her confidence strengthened. That confidence was what would give her the strength to leave.

And the last letter said that she had to get out. But I couldn't make out the rest of the note because of the bloodstains all over the page of the letter....

And there's a lot to learn about Joan.

"Did you find what you were looking for?" Joan asked from behind me. Her tone like ice, sent chills down my spine. A tone that I knew meant I had gone too far. I had broken the agreement. I had found her secrets and I was scared.

"Joanie." I call her that sometimes and perhaps this was not the right time but a last ditch effort to keep her here with me. "This isn't what it looks like. I didn't go looking for this, I was looking for my shoes, I didn't know what this box was so I looked... I know, I should have put it back but, I didn't and it's too late now so.... Can we just talk? You can trust me Joanie, I want to help you. Let me in."

I waited with bated breath for an answer that I was certain would be denial. Now I'm not sure at that point if I was more scared for her safety or mine. Don't get me wrong, her owning a handgun was frightening but, I was honestly more concerned with her well-being. I had finally seen a glimpse of the darkness inside, the monster that ran through her veins, and I was terrified that it was finally going to consume her completely.

When she finally turned to look at me her eyes were filled with tears, her voice choking on sobs, "You won't understand, no one understands. You'll leave me, once you see how fucked up I am, you'll leave, you won't love me...just like everyone else" her voice a whisper as she confessed this, her worst fear finally revealed.

"Joan, look at me. I promise you right here and now that I will not leave you. No matter the secrets, no matter the lies, the sins, the past. I love you right here, right now, and this will not change that."

She stared at the floor, out the window, at the yellowing walls, anything but me. It seemed like eternity that she sat there silent, contemplating one of the biggest decisions she may have ever had to make.

"Okay."

"It started when I was eight years old. My mom had just been admitted to the psychiatric ward at the hospital, it was just me and my dad. My aunt came to visit, she told me mom was on vacation, she'd be back in a few days, that this was a father-daughter weekend. I thought it would be great because I never saw my dad, he was hardly home. It was okay for the first night or two but the third night he came home drunk off his ass and I didn't know enough to hide yet. I was so young... I wanted to play a game, it was this silly little game with a crocodile, it was supposed to help me learn time actually. But um, he didn't want to, he told me to go away. But I really wanted to play, I didn't listen, I should have listened..."

After several minutes her sobs subsided and she continued "I kept badgering him and he lost his temper, he slammed the game right over the top of my head and told me

to get the fuck away from him. When I started crying he told me to shut my mouth, I'd be sorry if I didn't. He put his fist right through my mouth. It was how I lost my first baby tooth" she said this with kind of a mad giggle, as if she found that perverse moment somehow amusing.

"After that night things only got worse. At first I brushed it off, explained it away. I said it was because he was drunk, he was mad about work, he didn't mean to, he still loved me. When mom finally came home I was so sure things would be okay, he wouldn't do this when mom was home. But he did. And she didn't notice or didn't care. She started drinking more; she went out more, always shopping, always out with friends, always gone. I was left alone during most of the day. They both came home late at night – if they came home. I was lonely, I got scared a lot, and the worst was I couldn't talk about it - he would have killed me.

I got used to it after awhile, by the time I was 13 it was more of an expectation than a surprise. I made myself numb; I just lay there motionless while he did whatever. I wouldn't cry. I wouldn't give him that satisfaction. I wouldn't talk, I wouldn't scream, I wouldn't respond to anything. But late at night I would cry and cry like my tears would be my river, like my tears would take me away and if not that maybe they would at least drown me."

"Oh baby," I tried to embrace her but she pushed me away.

"Don't. I need to finish this; I need to let it go."

"I was 17 when my mom gave birth to my younger sister. Yes, I had a sister" she replied to my look of bewilderment.

"After all of the miscarriages my mother had throughout the years, when my father found out she was

pregnant again he forbid her from leaving the house until this child was born. He said he wanted a good one this time, not a crack whore, maybe one he might actually like. So for those nine months she stayed in bed, I waited on her hand and foot and though she had always said she wanted to be treated like the rich, I never saw her more miserable. It was probably because she couldn't drink. Anyways, they had the birth at home, everything went fine, I finally had a baby sister – Hannah. She was beautiful, the moment I held her I promised myself I would never let her be hurt, I would take care of her as my own. And I did for the first few months, I did everything, I got up every night she cried, I fed her, changed her, walked her, everything. She was my angel. One night she started crying and don't ask me why I didn't get up right away, to this day I hate myself for it, but I was so exhausted...I let her cry for a few moments but when I finally went to get up she stopped. I thought maybe mom was finally able to hold her, that she was finally going to take care of her...so I went back to bed. The next morning I slept late, when I finally woke up I wondered why the baby hadn't started crying at 7 like usual. When I went to the nursery I felt this coldness and fear gripped me, I slowly started for the crib...there was a pillow over her tiny head, she was blue..."

By now we were both in tears, "I failed her. I promised to keep her safe and I didn't. I'll never forgive myself. Never." Her voice trailed off and she began to cry uncontrollably. I held her for what seemed hours until she regained her composure. She continued in almost a monotone, as if she had shut off her feelings.

"That was when I knew I had to leave. I couldn't stay there any longer. At this time I had been talking to Evan online

for quite a few months and when I told him I was leaving home he suggested I come live with him. We had been pen pals for awhile and I mistakenly trusted him. I thought he was different, I thought he would love me. And he did for awhile, as long as I did what he wanted, but honestly I didn't really have a choice. 'No' wasn't in Evan's vocabulary. Again, I made myself numb, lay there as he did whatever to me, never arguing, too weak to fight, too scared to leave. It was one of the girls from work – I worked in a clothing store at the time – that suggested I learn how to shoot. I think she was just joking, but she said something about taking your anger out on a target rather than a man and I considered it. I never thought about killing Evan, only releasing something that was building up inside of me. The following week I traveled to a town maybe 65 miles away, I told Evan I was taking a yoga class. I bought the gun in this musty old pawn shop with a 14 karat necklace I still had from my aunt ten years before. I found a firing range close by and went there to shoot. I had no idea what I was doing, no sense of direction or control; honestly, it scared me. But, nonetheless every Thursday I went out to Forge to shoot. After about three months or so I was hitting every bull's eye, I knew what I was doing, I felt empowered. I started thinking about my situation, about my life, my choices. How long was I going to let people hurt me? So I went home and packed my bags, I was planning on just leaving a note but Evan came home early that night. I tried to talk to him, I tried explaining, being forceful, to just say 'Hey, I'm leaving and that's that.' It didn't go that way at all. He started pushing me around, yelling, at one point he had me pinned against the wall with his hands around my throat telling me I wasn't allowed to leave him, that I should be grateful that he took in such a good for nothing slut. I thought he was going to kill me, which

wouldn't have been so bad but there was this voice in my head. It was my father telling me how I wasn't good enough, how he didn't love me, how I would never amount to anything, how I belonged to him...

I pulled the trigger. But when I shot, it wasn't just Evan that I was shooting. I was shooting my father for all his hatred. I was shooting my mother for leaving me. I was shooting my rapists, my abusers, my enemies. I shot my pain, my tears, my fear, my abyss. I shot myself."

We sat in silence as the setting sun cast shadows across the bedroom. The shadows concealed parts of her face but not enough to cover the continuous stream of tears that was raining from her eyes. Not enough to mask the pain that was surging through her.

"Joanie, baby."

No answer. No look. No response. No life.

"Honey, I can't even imagine how much you have endured, and I realize that this isn't even half of what you are harboring inside but I think we should probably go to bed. It's been a long day, you need to rest, try to relax."

With a slight nod of her head, she moved away from her post at the window. We crawled into bed and shut off the lights. I held her hand hoping that she would be there in the morning, hoping that it would be okay. Wondering if it would ever be okay. With one ever present thought...

There's a lot to learn....

And there's a lot I learned about Joan.

Switch the Bitch

Cheryl Feeney

who movingly critiques
and lovingly cackles
is lonely longing

for a hobbit of habit
to Hip Hop away
and negate the debate

a phase so dazed
brings words unsaddled
to an embittered battle

Don't

Mutuality a'mutilate
With unbridled revering
Only to dissipate

Do

Surrender the cries
Leave behavior unrattled
Put a stop to the prattle

Announce a retreat
Unsaddle the battle

Keep it real sweet

Affirm the unique

Contribute to keep

Prize a Loved One

Centered

Cheryl Feeney

Before I rise

To the very prize
Of another day a'dawning

Before I prance

To take a glance
At the wondrous day unfolding

Before I glide

With a sense of pride
To jolt a bean a'grinding

Before I wash

And dress so posh
To nosh with neighbor's calling

Before I pray

To the sky all grey
That today will be rewarding

I turn to you

And can't feel blue
So senseless are my longings

Blurred Reflections

Cheryl Feeney

Ah, to be wicked, rich and maligned
Shrouded in prickly fortress of vines
Abandoned at youth to fend for myself
Sadness engulfed me and darkness won out

Oh, Magic Mirror you're not my friend
You've haunted and hooted my spirit within
Now poor Snow White, I'll damage for sure
Sadness will swallow all thoughts I adore

I'll dredge the fruit with darkness deep
The mirror will love me and the dwarfs will retreat
My beauty will reign at the death of her sweet
Dissolved with a bite my illusion replete

Oh what have I gained by killing a beauty
How shallow my aims to attain a glory
Now is the time to take a stand
 Refuse the influence of an evil hand

Where would I turn for future advice
I know nothing more than reflection's device
Who would I trust in a world full of woe
 That I've created from way down below

My fate and image I can't release
 Splinters of glass that cut so deep
Pinned by vines so deep and low
 My struggle will tell of jealousy woes

Precipitation

Cheryl Feeney

Before the clouds
collide and clack
I'll down the picnic awning

Before the rains
elect to collect
Cut flowers I'll be pawning

Before the steady stream descends
those cottage windows I do tend

But,
Before I rest
in a screened porch perch
listening to the pouring

I'll brew a tea
and think of thee
we lovers in the morning

Hills Echo Color

Tracy A. Ulrich

Trees,
Peacefully echo
Eyes,
Beautifully call

Fire tower sees green
Neighbor passionate pink

Land,
Brightly forever
Stream,
Clearly elegant.

Frogs mate interrupted
Mosquitoes hearing too

Days,
Flawlessly tiptoe
Thunder,
Loudly echo

Starlight radiant white
Dinner relaxes black

Tent,

Contently snuggled
Week,
Deplorably pass.

Eyelids close delighted
Nightfall silently brown

Moosehead Lake
I Love You

Tracy A. Ulrich

Moosehead Lake
I love you
Heart contented with your impression
Mind at ease in your desertedness
Kayak afloat with fishing pole in hand

Ruse dead ache
I love you anyway
Tears flowing from this California girl
Trees thick with visible denseness
Sedentary with three bass

Noose head make
I love you
Fry over open fire, eyes on quiet sunset
Dare be me, totter to outhouse
Searching for bear, observing me

Boost Tedd Jake
I love you
Excitement seeing old friends
Fire pit primitive campground
Smiles all around

Loose bed make
I still love you
Flashlight and a book
And a grin that won't quit
Look forward to another day

night wish

Tracy A. Ulrich

"Traaace"

name reverberates from nowhere
body vibrates out of slumber
that same familiar voice

"Mom!"

cries burst from mouth
heart beats out
my chest pounds
with blackness
of night.

I wonder
how much longer
I will hear
your voice
like yesterday.

Lights beam on
so I don't fail to recall

Casino

Tracy A. Ulrich

Gambling we go
Me short Sandy tall
Both thin
And cold.
Easing the pain
Casino.
Mom dying
At home.
Surprise, we are away
Excusing
Woman smoke
Takes away cheer.
Lanky steps toward beautiful coin
Take me home.
Understanding Conversation
Mind at rest.

and friends

Tracy A. Ulrich

oh pam
driving here and there I am
learning about your caring
towards friends and family,
erin, molly and emily.
you can remember everything
heard from everyone
where I lose track of you
through all of your talking.
laugh, and laugh
can't help but laugh.
you've given me the strength
to open up
can't help but open up
you are caring.
our talks next to the lake, by the dam
where it's too damn cold for even sand.
land is sparse, and the moon is bright
and the stars never end.
tears flow with love pam,
laughing, and laughing.

Light Dusting of Snow

Tracy A. Ulrich

View exquisite with music softly humming violins, deep pipes barely heard in the warmth of the wagon. Twenty five degrees shivers cold, but the view is magnificent. Birch, oaks, burst in my face, looming seven stories low, light dusting of snow, on lake that spreads, stretches and seeps, through sparse inlets of past herrings and blueberries. Trees dart around like a jigsaw puzzle, where the view sends mind into peaceful contentment. Cottages dispense evenly hidden, leaving bareness of winter exposed to ice fishing. Sky expands high, full, with spider limbs reaching high of generous view. Music calms my muscles. Tiny thawed patches of once water fascinate my eye, breaking through, enter my mind. Life of an artist is wonderful, lonely life. Intake of continuous feelings pressing down, wondering, "can it be true?" Tears of passion ponder inside to wondrous containment, turns into life, accept with excitement. Hold on tight to life's middle age, changes traveling fast with observance.

Letter to Paul

Susan Suarez

To my brother in Christ, Apostle Paul,

This letter comes to you across the sea of space and time from America, in the year of our Lord, 2005. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I greet you with a holy kiss. I want you to know that your work and words of encouragement and truth have been most important to the ones who follow the Master. However, it is with sadness that I report to you that they still do not understand the full meaning of His teaching, and of your visions of Him. There are some who claim Jesus has called them, but they pervert and distort the laws and ways of peace to suit their own pursuit of control and power over the weak. They claim their misdeeds are the will of God and are not contested.

The Emperor of this land proclaims himself a Christian openly so that the people will put their faith in him to lead us. The Master said He came to uphold the Law, not to break it, but this Emperor breaks three of God's laws given to Moses. The Law states, Thou shall not kill, yet he kills in war and poverty every day. The Law states, Thou shall not covet, yet he began the current war to control oil in the "enemy's" possession. The Law states, Thou shall not bear false witness, yet he declared his enemy was hiding weapons and a plan to attack our country. He openly commits these crimes against God's laws and still Christians believe he is doing the right thing. He brainwashes with doubletalk and one-sided

arguments and his evil words are loaded pistols aimed at the minds of those who seek a leader and live in fear – the sheep.

There are those who see through this modern Ceasar, but, as you have experienced yourself, there are those who exchange the truth of God for a lie, and worship and serve created things rather than the Creator. The people just want to sleep, to be hypnotized by entertainment, sports, and meaningless distractions. They have lost sight of the true meaning of Jesus' teachings. They have forgotten the joy in serving God. Even the priests deny the power of the Holy Spirit is available to everyone, and they appoint a Holy Father to sit as a judge between man and God. They are still baptizing with water when Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

Brother Paul, I know that to each is given according to their own understanding, but how long must people be in the dark? When will they choose to open their eyes? It saddens and bewilders me when I speak to someone who is waiting for our Lord to appear in the clouds to save them. There are multitudes of people like this! They are waiting for Jesus to come and fix everything for them! They do not know that He is here now! How can they allow themselves to be so blinded? Do the clergy themselves not know the truth? He appeared to Mary, the Apostles, and you after the crucifixion! You had not met Him in the flesh and yet He called your name. He healed your heart and mind and baptized you with the Holy Spirit! Yet, they still wait for Him to return. Do they believe the story ended with the end of the Bible? There are reports of our Lord teaching all over the world after his physical death on the cross! How can they not see that He never left? The Bible tells us that we are the body of Christ. To me that means that if we are willing vessels He will use us to do God's Will here on earth. My favorite of Jesus' sayings is that "You shall do as I have done

and more.” That means to me that even now, 2000 years after his physical death, we too can be blessed with the in-dwelling Holy Spirit and work miracles. I know it does. Why are there so few who know after all this time?

There have been some who rose above the fear of evil men, the grip of Satan and his mind games: Martin Luther and his modern namesake, Martin Luther King, Jr.; Thomas Jefferson, who played a role in creating this nation based on freedom of religion and the truth that all men are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; Gandhi, who freed the entire nation of India from tyranny using love, peace, and compassion. A former President of America, Jimmy Carter, continues today to spread Peace among nations, years after his rule has ended.

Yet, even with all of these people, and more, who demonstrate great personal power through love, people still feel powerless and lost. Love, God, and peace are still just intellectual concepts for them. They cannot seem to break through that taught mind-set and make these things a reality. They do not know the meaning of “Heaven is at hand”.

I do not tell you these things to trouble your heart. Your words are most important. You allowed us the belief that He would come to us in Spirit, and for some of us He has. Maybe many more have had visions or heard His voice and are afraid to speak of it or doubt the reality of the experience. The reality of spiritual life has been greatly depleted in this age. For most, it is reserved for a few hours on the Sabbath, if at all.

I tell you these things with hopes that you will pray for us. Across time and space, send us the ability to love our brothers and sisters. Pray for us so that we may have eyes to see and ears to hear. Pray for us so that we may be aware that we are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single

garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Pray for us to understand that an eye for an eye makes the world blind. Pray for us to know, in our hearts that Heaven is truly at hand. Pray for us, Saint Paul, that we comprehend that war is over, if we want it.

With Love and Peace, your sister in Christ,
Susan Suarez

No Regrets

Brian Moorhead

Perched atop the hill
but far enough forward to be on a slant,
The bicycle was beckoned forth by the ghost of potential
energy
held back only by the sandaled toes of its rider.
He pushed off with a kick
as though the tremendous slant wouldn't be enough
losing his sandals in the process
stretching his legs out far to the side
as the bicycle began its downward plow.
Faster and faster the bicycle careened
the wind pummeling his face
or his face pummeling the wind?
The spokes whipping through air until
the sound of them was so much like the sound of a car
approaching from behind
that he couldn't help but look over his shoulder.
The road began to swerve underneath his tires
And he, having put his hands behind his head long ago,
leaned with all his might to see
if he could steer with no hands.
He unbuckled the strap on his helmet
and tossed it to the side of the road

to feel the wind through his hair.
He figured he'd come back for it when he came back for his
sandals
maybe.

In front of him, approaching fast,
the main street of the village below.

The Where Song

Brian Moorhead

Where's my wallet?
Where's my watch?
Where's your mother?
Where'd she go?
Where are you going?
Where are you from?
Where's that sound coming from?
Where did I park my car?
Where's the gas station?
Where's the best gas prices?
Where should I go to eat?
Where's the highway?
Where am I?
Where are you?
Where's your common sense?
Where's the food?
Where's my cat?
Where are my keys?
Where do I go from here?
Where else can I go?
Where can I find you?
Where's Waldo?
Where's North?
Where's the moon?

Where's the Big Dipper?
Where's the Southern Cross?
Where's my camera?
Where's my coat?
Where's my wallet?
Where's my watch?

What I Learned from the Police

Brian Moorhead

That's my soul up there
And in this theatre that I call my soul,
I always play the starring role.

But even when I'm so lonely
As an Englishman in New York,
And the world is running down,
I have to make the best of what's still around
because there's a hundred million other castaways
looking for a home too.

So when I'm caught between the Scylla and Charibdis
I could send out an SOS
But I'll be wrapped around your finger
'cause I've stood here before inside the pouring rain
with the world turning circles running round my brain
and I've learned that in the end,
nothing relieves the Sting.

Forward Mom's Mail Here

Brian Moorhead

Grass upkeep, marble polished.
Deep emotion, past memories
saturated the landscape.
Footsteps seem different.
A stillness felt.

Instant Microwave Sonnet

Brian Moorhead

The baconburger landed on the plate.
It landed with a most peculiar thump.
It looked delicious, but I couldn't eat;
I didn't have a glass of milk to drink
and the refrigerator had no milk.

I looked around for something else to drink
before my baconburger got all cold,
but it'd been far too long since I had been
to town for shopping at the grocery store.

I could've gone down to the store right then
but then my burger would've gotten cold
And (as I hope most everybody knows)
some meals, when eaten, just require milk.

But I resolved to eat it anyway.

A Different Me

Chris Dana

Herein begins the tale of a life distraught with perils unthinkable by the average man, things that would seem unbelievable to those disassociated from such a life, herein lies the tale of my life, Bob Jones. As I sat pondering why I had such an immense desire to write the story of my life I soon found that hours turned into days which eventually turned into weeks and months. In this pondering was also the thought of many a novice writer, how will I start it even if I do sit down to write it? So let me start instead with thoughts that are surfacing as I speak: I hate, and I really do mean hate, the name Bob. Who in the hell names their kid Bob anyway? Especially accompanied by a last name as common and mundane as Jones, my own name defies the laws of cliché-ism, but I digress. Where was I? Ah yes, the story of my life. I suppose I will start at the beginning.

I was fourteen years old when it all started. I was startled awake one morning to my mother's incessant nagging. As I opened my blurry eyes slowly and covered my ears to temporarily escape the onslaught of verbal attacks, this was no surprise as I had dealt with it many times before. My vision began to focus on a tall slim figure ominously looming over my bed. The point of her finger prodded me to accent her muffled obscenities; little droplets of saliva reeking of vodka began to wet my face. Slightly loosening

the kung fu death grip around my left ear, I tuned my senses into the words spewing forth from my mother's loud mouth picking only bits and pieces out of it.

Lazy...worthless...late...school—bingo. Firmly welding my hand back to the side of my head I got out of bed and trailed off to the bathroom. I shut the door and put my arms at my side; ah, silence.

"Hello, Bob," said the voice of some older man. Although it seemed likely that I had never heard this voice before, it had a strange familiar quality to it. "Hello," I said back reluctantly.

"You have no idea who I am, do you?"

"No, not really"

"You have no idea who I am, yet you show no fear?"

"Why would I be afraid of you?"

"Bobby, you have so much to learn, but don't worry, we have plenty of time."

The silence that followed felt awkward, a shiver shot up my spine to let me know my body didn't agree with it either. The truth was I was a little afraid, I mean, you're in your bathroom alone and all the sudden some weird guy is throwing you random greetings. What the hell? I searched the bathroom in vain but found nobody, no weird guy ducking behind the shower curtain, no audio device tucked away behind the sink, nothing. So where did the voice come from? My good friend sleep deprivation, that had to be it. I jumped in the shower to wash up quickly so as not to make myself any more late.

I wore the usual black carpenter jeans and my old Korn hoodie. Staring back at me in the mirror was a tired and worn out kid, too old for his age. My brown hair was getting way too long, almost to my eyes. I didn't even bother brushing it or putting gel in it, it was sort of like a mop top haircut I guess. Back then I was kind of scrawny, I only weighed about 110 and was 5'3". I didn't really have many distinguishing features, as with most of my life. I brushed my teeth and called it good. Ready for another exciting day at school, so fun! Yeah, right.

"Don't forget to eat your breakfast Bob, I worked too hard to make it for you to jus..." my mother's voice trailed off as I passed through the house and out the front door. I stepped off the porch step and directly into a cold puddle of water. Splashes and ripples danced all around me creating an aqueous symphony of nature. Gloomy skies and the occasional crash of thunder reminded the sun to stay away. "Lovely weather we're having," I muttered to myself as I sat down on the curb awaiting the school bus. I didn't care that I was getting soaked. I loved being in the rain. There was something soothing about watching it form a small river on the sides of streets, carrying all the dirt and muck to the sewers where it belonged. I glanced at my cheap Spongebob Squarepants wrist watch that I had gotten out of a cereal box, his big yellow hands pointed to 7 and 22, "late my ass." The school bus pulled up at about 7:30, I pulled myself in and began my walk down the narrow hallway being careful not to look anyone straight in the eye or touch them. About 20 more minutes to school, hooray.

I sat on the bus in my usual place, back-left, alone, dazing off and getting lost in random thoughts as I did most

every day. I wasn't a loser per say; Yeah, I didn't have any friends but not because I couldn't make them, I didn't have them because I didn't want them. I was one of those "different" kids, the ones that other kids just generally stay away from just because. The different kids are a strange place on the social hierarchy, the only ones, I'd say, that are a neutral party. The jocks, the geeks, the Goths, the preppies, and so on; none of them hated me, but none of them liked me either, just the way I liked it. This rule applied to everyone except for one, Josh Shalin. I have no clue why this guy didn't like me, he just didn't. In fact he had made it his personal obligation to attend school every day so that he could display to me his hatred. I was never much for violence, so I never really did much when he initiated his verbal abuse and petty name calling. The confrontations between Josh and I had just lately started turning physical; pushing, arm punching, kicking, which had started to really bug me, I was becoming in danger of being demoted from my neutral place and forced to bear the title of "geek" and become accustomed to new accommodations on the inside of a locker. I was not too fond of the idea of being shoved into a locker, or trash can for that matter, but something unknown to me compelled me to decide that today was the day I'd finally do something to stop this quarrel between the two of us. How, you ask? Well, at this point that was a good question as I did not as of yet have a good answer.

The loud squeal of the school bus brakes as it pulled into the school parking lot snapped me out of my dazed state. I stood up and diligently followed the single file line that led to the hell hole more formally known as school. Suddenly I was gripped with an immense pain originating

in the back of my head. Wincing in pain, I quickly lunged forward and clenched the back of the seat beside me for support. The pain was so great that I had to stop for a few seconds just to keep myself from falling forward. The voice from earlier that morning rang loudly in my head, "make it count... 10:02 on the dot... check his left... make it count." As suddenly as it had hit me the pain subsided. Ok, now I know I'm going crazy. What a strange experience, what a painful... headache I guess you could call it.

I entered the school to the usual hustle bustle of everyone just starting to get ready for first period at the very last minute, "squee, squee, squee, squee," God, is there anything more annoying than hundreds of wet shoes running around on a glossy floor? 26, 32, 18 and a hard kick beckoned my locker to open, I threw my backpack in save for my math book and headed to class.

Bright lights glared menacingly and relentlessly down on me from the ceiling above and passed one after another in a migraine inducing pattern as I walked to room 42. Still in a slight daze and my head still recovering from the headache thing, my thoughts were completely enveloped in that voice as if I knew who it was, but I didn't; hard to explain I guess. I spent my time in class zoning out and staring at the clock, 8:00...8:25...8:45...9:00... what did that voice mean by 10:02 on the dot?

"Would you care to elaborate on this concept please, Mr. Jones?" a voice bellowed out at me from the front of the room. I voiced an audible "ugh" to the room expressing my discontent at being greeted with yet again, too loud a voice accompanied by my angry red faced teacher.

"I'm sorry Mr. Granger. Could you repeat the question?" I asked in an uncaring monotone voice.

"No, I will not Mr. Jones, but I'll tell you what I will do, I will give you a first class trip to the office, how does that sound?"

"First class? Gasp, really for me? Mr. Granger how nice of you, that sounds fantastic!" I replied with enthusiastic sarcasm.

I marched to the front of the room to receive my ticket which I had apparently so eloquently earned. The laughter of my classmates colored in the remaining white in my teacher's face until it glowed with a seething red anger.

The bright pink slip crunched and wrinkled in my tightly clenched fist as I walked to the office. I briefly looked down at my wrist just before I walked through the door, 9:06.

"Can I help you?" a voice chirped out at me in a far too bright and cheery voice. I gave her my best attempt at a smile which probably looked way too forced and slid my first class ticket across the table.

"Ooh someone's been a trouble maker." She briefly looked over the note and signed it.

Looks like there's a side note for you to see the principal, have a seat and I'll go get him." I sat down on the bench next to another trouble maker, Tommy Rinetto, one of those kids that practically live in the office, a little badass. I shut my eyes and replayed the day's events over.

"But, what's at 10:02?" I thought to myself.

"Your salvation," replied a loud voice in my head.

"Why are you doing this? What do you want from me?" Realizing that I'd just vocalized my thoughts, I glanced

up to see who, if anyone, had heard me. The only one who heard was Tommy, who then slid to the farthest end of the bench.

"You again Mr. Jones?" Principal Lark asked with a sigh. "Step into my office please." I sat down in the hard wooden chair that faced the principal's enormous desk. The contrast between us was purposely intimidating; the only thing he was missing was a big wooden gavel. I started to imagine him wearing one of those stupid old century white roll wigs and a long black robe.

"Bob Jones, you stand on trial for the murder of your education in the first degree, not paying attention in class, how do you plead?"

"Guilty your honor," I replied solemnly.

"Excuse me?" asked the principal with a look of confusion on his face.

"Nothing, uhh never mind."

"Mr. Jones, this is the third time you've been sent to my office this month, I do not have the time nor the patience for your insubordination and blatant disregard for this school, and our rules and policies. I have no choice but to personally inform your parents or guardian so they can resolve the matter at home on your time." I opened my mouth to explain my mother's condition and her lack of ability to resolve anything but words fell short as they always did when it came to talking about her.

9:15... "Whom shall I contact?" Principal Lark asked holding the phone off the hook. "My father is dead," I blurted out. I'll never truly know why it is I said that so suddenly. Maybe it was because I'd never actually said it before or maybe it was because I was trying to affirm it, to

finally accept it, and then again, maybe it was just in response to the question; by reason of deduction call my mother. Principal Lark looked back at me, slightly perplexed.

"I... I'm sorry to hear that... I suppose we'll call your mother then, number please?" I picked a pen out of its holder and wrote it down. His fingers still poised on the numbers he stalled for a few moments before dialing the number that lay in front of him. I could faintly hear a ring on the other line then the click of a pick up.

"Mrs. Jones? Hello, this is Principal Lark at Rutmont High, I have your son Bob here... Yes, well, this isn't the first time..." I quickly lost interest in what was being said. I wondered if my mother was even forming coherent sentences on the other line. I could just imagine her stupid drunken babble, "What? Who er you? Who's Bob? My Bob? What the fuck didge you jus call me?" The tap and click of the phone being carefully set back in its place regained my attention.

"She'll be here soon to pick you up, go wait outside on the bench." I could hardly believe that she actually finished a conversation, let alone convince someone she was fit to drive. As I got up to leave, the principal stopped me, his gaze piercing into my eyes as if looking for something only partially visible.

"Bob, is there anything you would like to tell me? Do you need help?" It was the first time anyone had ever asked me that, I felt like just giving in. I felt like telling him everything: how my father committed suicide when I was only 8 years old, how my mother's only solution to his leaving and all else in her life was alcohol. I wanted to tell

him about the voice, admit I was scared, feel reassurance of his promises to try and help me.

"See you next week Lark." I said smugly as I opened the door. "I'll have a brand new pink slip for you to file." As I walked over the threshold, I fought back the tears that began to well up.

9:45, I got sick of sitting on the bench and decided to just wait outside. The bell had just rung 5 minutes prior so I was once again walking through the last minute rush. Just as I neared the exit I was knocked off my feet and slammed into the nearest row of lockers. I felt as though I had just been hit by a brick wall. As I regained my senses all I could hear was a light ringing and a roar of laughter.

"Watch where you're goin, freak!" Josh shouted down at me. Something came over at me at that moment, this whole day just started to piss me off—*way* too many feelings. Without saying a word I quickly rose to my feet, pulled back my arm as far as I could and thrust my fist straight into Josh's nose. The crunching of cartilage, a steady stream and forming pool of sanguine blood, and eventually Josh sobbing like a little girl was the most satisfying thing I could remember. I finally understood sensory overload. I shook the spots of blood from my hand and continued out the front door leaving Josh on his knees crying and holding what nose he had left. Someone would eventually come out and tell me how much trouble I was in, or tell me how awesome that was, I didn't care. I sat down on the curb looking straight into the sky. The rain poured hard and seemed cleansing.

It was almost 10:00; I took a deep breath and readied myself for whatever it was that was coming. My mother

finally swerved around the corner and up to the front of the school. It had been nearly 15 minutes since I hit Josh; it was surprising that no one came out to talk to me. I glanced back into the school, the crowd around the outside of the nurses office was just dispersing. Mr. Granger, being a part of the group, saw me and began to pick up his pace. I heard the rusty creak and slam of the driver's side door as my mother stumbled out of the old Honda. It seemed almost orchestrated when they both reached me at the same time.

"Mrs. Jones... your boy is a disgrace; he is a disrespectful, insolent little jerk that needs to be taught some proper manners. I'll have you know that he just broke the nose of some poor young man simply for occupying the same space as him."

"You really have turned out to be worthless, just like your father." My mothers eyes looked fierce, her face contorted with drunken hatred. My head jolted quickly to the side in reaction to the stinging slap my mother imparted across my face; I came close to falling to the ground. As I raised my head I saw Josh standing at a distance in the open doorway facing me. Gripped tightly in his right hand was a black piece of metal, a handle, a familiar shape, a gun. 10:02...BANG! Immense pressure in my chest, stinging, burning, fading...BANG! The second doesn't hurt as bad as the first...I could feel the fading sounds of a struggle...a fading to grayish black...Sirens, shouting, I get lifted, then...black.

"Remember that destinies aren't pre-determined Bobby, they are made. Everyone can change. You did the right thing. I love you, son."

"Beep...beep...beep...beep...beep," the monitor tracking my surprisingly steady heartbeat was the first thing I heard when I finally awoke. I was lying in a bed looking up at my mother who was staring down at me. This time there was no shouting, no name calling, just sobbing. She hugged me and promised me things would be different from now on.

That was 15 years ago, I'm 29 now. Things changed after that. After a long hard road nearly 3 years following, my mother went completely sober. Being a 17 year old, the courts ruled that Josh be tried as an adult facing attempted murder charges, I heard his sentence was 20 to life. Mr. Granger was awarded a medal for bravery in disarming the boy. The doctors told me it was a miracle I lived.

Apparently, one of the bullets was only an eighth of an inch away from my heart and if I hadn't jumped in front of my mother at the exact moment I did, she would have died for certain. Every day, at 10:02 sharp my mother calls me to tell me how much she loves me. Although I'm only 29 I feel as though one life, one Bob, lived and died at the age of 14. I could sit here and go on and on about my current life, my wife, my kids, my job, but that's a different story all in itself, a different Bob Jones.

Black

Amanda Williams-Jordan

Black Darker end

Black Mail

Black Negro

Black to Spare

Black Night

Black not Right

Black No class

Black Low Class

Black Negative Swing

From a

Tree!

Represented as a

Porch Monkey!

Black as Tar;

Nigger is Black

Ignorant Too!

If, you are

Black, people

Might Stereotype You!

My Soul is Gone

Amanda Williams-Jordan

It ran away
It took my heart and stripped
Me of my dignity

Wandering off
Accepting myself
Trying to find united
In ones self!

Dying to find empathy

Fuck you sympathy.

Darkened by my

Madness, naked

To my happiness!

Finding Maryland

Tracy A. Ulrich

Driving on the road again was a great relief, though I hate to say that, considering I was just camping with my parents in their huge motor home. Camping alone brought me enormous peace, compared to those RV's parked next to each other. We could almost touch. Those damn things are like driving a home around, and Mom and Dad stayed at those fancy campgrounds too. This one was in Virginia, which had a little pond surrounded by trimmed grass, with an occasional bunny hopping by. Fishing with Dad was fun, casting our poles, not caring that we weren't catching anything. It was great just to be together, talking of our different travels.

I'd been slowly camping for two months, tenting along the southern states and then up the eastern mountain. My parents were cruising along for three weeks and there we were, meeting up in Virginia. We started from San Diego.

I was traveling The Blue Ridge Parkway that was beyond beautiful to me, the outside matching the feeling I had within. The cool weather and bright green leaves, on approaching changing trees. Driving a steady 45mph, the days were full of changing landscape.

That one day traveling into Virginia from North Carolina, I was feeling great. My body was free of pain. I felt rested after two days of camping on the side of the parkway. Bass Lake was between the Smokey Mountains in Tennessee and the next campground in Virginia. I knew I couldn't drive to

Virginia in a day, so I stayed at Bass Lake. Being disappointed at first of the tiny campsite so close to the road, I soon felt comfortable when meeting some pleasant guys to hang out with.

The two brothers walked over and offered to help put my tent up. I was surprised and thrilled by their offer. I had made friends already, and the help to put the tent up was a great relief after driving all day. We got the tent up quickly, and nicely they invited me over for dinner. The invitation was perfect, since cooking was the last thing I was going to do.

We laughed while the sun set, over our dinner of hotdogs and macaroni and cheese. We talked as old friends about our travels throughout the years, and laughed more about our poor dinner, and how we could have Jiffy Pop popcorn for dessert. What a great idea to have Jiffy Pop instead of that old fashion type I brought. By eight o'clock I was ready to hit my sleeping bag. The friendship between strangers was wonderful. I lay there thinking of them on my comfy bed while looking at the stars, until I fell asleep.

The next morning I slept in, disappointed to find that my friends were gone, off fishing. Over my morning coffee I saw that they had left the jiffy pop behind the back tire of my car, and had to laugh thinking of how much fun the three of us had the night before. Finding compassion flooded over me in so many different ways. Bonding with strangers I've found to be the best part of my trip, and the most surprising. When I reached out to someone along the way, I usually received more than I figured. Compassion ever so lightly touching my heart.

Trees blocked the view of the lake from my site; however, driving into the tiny tourist town, I saw the gorgeous indigo lake, clutching to the side of the mountain. The sky was bright blue and the day warm, life just got a little better.

The tiny town had little shops of unique coffees, earrings, clothing, and paintings. I didn't walk long exploring the small town, but bought a variety of nuts for my traveling food. I drove back and forth looking for a laundromat, which was the main reason for going there. Once it was found on a hidden street, I was extremely happy to see a huge basin where I could wash my hair. I looked around, wondering if anyone would notice or even care, and then went for it. The day kept on getting better. Sponge baths were easy in the tent, but the hair was a different story.

Driving back to my campsite wasn't far and good thing, because I started feeling tired, but still pain free. I laid around in my cozy tent and read a cheap novel, listening to people play Frisbee and enjoying the nice day. Feeling warm was the best after freezing in the Smokey Mountains. I missed snow there by one day, but it still didn't go above twenty-five degrees. I invited myself to other campers' fires, discovering a great way to meet people. The rest of that day was to relax and prepare for the drive the next morning, by staying off my tired legs that have had so much exercise over the months.

Meanwhile, pulling up to my next campground, I discovered it was empty and had just opened the week before. What a relief. For six bucks a night I had the place to myself. Now that was camping to me, I loved the peace and serenity of silence. I set up camp and walked around with a smile on my face, when I received a phone call from my Dad saying they were in Virginia. After talking, we discovered they were only a hundred miles north of where I was. I was happy to have heard from him, yet disappointed to know I would be leaving that beautiful campground the next morning.

Fixing some soup and munching on nuts as I enjoyed the quiet, missing anyone was far from my mind. Spring was in

the air and the mountain had come alive with a hit of new flowers and fresh trees. The Blue Ridge Parkway was a gorgeous drive on a mountain ridge with different states on each side. The pheasant crossing the road as I entered a small tunnel surprised and delighted me, and made me think of all the animals living in those thick woods. I was in love with that land.

The evening didn't have a sound, and I had no fear of being alone. I would have never lasted that trip if I was scared. Everyone always said how brave I was to travel alone, much less in campgrounds by myself. I soon got tired of hearing that and replied once sarcastically, "This is a free country." Of course, hearing that I was brave wasn't the worst thing to hear, quite flattering in fact, but for some reason it bothered me. Maybe because I never heard that while growing up, I was just a typical girl with a disability.

As a child my mom used to tell me to stick up for myself, "If anyone calls you names, or pushes you down, don't just walk away." Those were her words, and I took them literally and tough, just like my mom was. So as a very young girl, I used to beat up the boys after a remark like, "you crippled," or if I was pushed down. So even if a typical day at school was me pounding some boy into the ground, with the principal pulling me off, the boys were the ones to get in trouble.

As an adult, I see that others don't make eye contact with me, or don't befriend me. My therapist told me they were afraid of what they didn't know. So sometimes I can't help myself but say, "You better run away, it's contagious," as my arms start flapping uncontrollably. It's hard for me not to laugh.

The morning came too early, but the sun was shining and I felt good, physically and mentally. Everything came together

easily and I was back in my car, on my way to be with my parents. The short drive was all freeway, which I soon began to hate. The cars passed by without a care in the world, besides themselves, zooming past me like I was a little old woman. Of course, I was probably driving like a little old woman after my casual driving on the parkway.

Dad and Mom were happy to see me when I got there, and I was happy to see them too, but realized right away that I had changed. I'd been alone for years it seemed, but two months was long enough to put me in a different state of mind. The stars and serenity weren't around there, instead my Mom sat around and drank, just like she did at home. Dad was up for anything and everything, but not without Mom, he never left her side it seemed.

I did convince Dad to go see the "Natural Bridge" with me, where we had the most fun. We walked around and shared a sandwich. Those little things stay in my mind. And the night before I left, Dad and I soaked in the hot tub. I showered afterwards and did my laundry, which was the most contentment I got out of my stay with my parents.

The next morning we said our goodbyes, and I was happy to be on my way to Maryland. I was going to explore Washington DC, where my parents were on their way to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. I cruised those freeways like I always did in San Diego, I just wanted to get back to serenity. The campground was right on the Potomac River, and ended up costing me sixty-three bucks for three nights. There goes the hundred dollar bill my parents gave me, but I was stuck there for the costs in that area were expensive, because of DC.

Once again, I was the only one in the campground, besides some guys from Europe traveling on their bicycles. I plugged in my cell phone that had been giving me problems,

and made me wonder why I had the damn thing at all. My site was pretty with large trees and a wide area to sit and walk around in. After everything was ready and I'd eaten a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, I took a walk to the river. The wooden walkway was narrow and took me out to view the Potomac River, left and right.

Casually waking back to my site, I couldn't have been happier.

I had just turned on my cell when I heard the usually silent ring. My girlfriend from home gasped as if she were out of breath. "Don't move, the reception is bad and I've been trying to get a hold of you for two days. Your brother has tried too, and then asked me if I would continue trying for him. Call Tony, your niece Kashmir has been in a terrible accident, and the doctors aren't sure if she will live. Tony needs you to call, so call right now okay?"

Dropping to the ground next to my car, my legs not holding me up, I dialed my brother without feeling. The sky fell down on me as the phone rang on the other end. Tony picked up the phone, and as soon as I said "Hi," he started crying. In between his tears, I heard that a car hit Kashmir when she was on her bike, and the doctors said the next two weeks will tell if she will live. We both cried and cried, feeling the closeness that we have always had but in a new way.

My aunt got on the phone and I asked her to please stay with my brother, and not to leave him. She promised. And I promised my brother I would find our parents and tell them what was going on. In the meantime, I couldn't walk, all I could do was cry and look at the ground that was swaying while I laid there holding on to my sanity. I'd never passed out before, but thought this might be the moment.

While lying on the ground trying to get on my feet, my body couldn't stop crying long enough to hang on to the open door. As I hung on, a neighbor walked by and asked if he could help. I told him what had happened, and he gently offered me to come over for tea later, if I needed to talk. Compassion again came my way, but at that time I could barely see. My inner strength pulled together in a way like Superman would, then I was strong with business to take care of.

Walking to the ranger's station my thoughts were with my niece and my brother, and honestly, myself. I was very far from home, and the closest person I have as a daughter was in the hospital fighting for her life. What was I going to do? After an hour trying to find my parents and only getting answering machines, I dialed the local police. I firmly told them to find my parents and take them to the nearest phone, and call me there at the ranger's station.

Pacing around the station, waiting, I found a little stuffed animal that must have belonged to the owner of that private office the ranger offered. I gave the little animal a squeeze and said a silent prayer for my niece's life. The ranger who gave me my privacy couldn't help but overhear, and gave me his condolences. The nice man offered to find airline prices on the internet, if that was what I needed. I felt so thankful for that man, for it never crossed my overwhelmed mind, and it gave me something to do.

My mind was pleasantly distracted until the phone rang. It was the police. First Dad was on the phone, and then he passed it to Mom. After telling them the story with strength I didn't know I had, I told them I was flying home to be with Tony and Kashmeir. Mom thought I was thinking in haste, and that Tony must have been exaggerating. Anger instantly

crept through my body, and for the first time in my life I yelled at my Mom. "You will fly home for her funeral though right? How can I stay here and enjoy Washington DC, while my niece might die?" I told her that I was flying home, and they could do what they want, and hung up.

I thanked the ranger for his compassion and floated off to see the host, yelling "I will never forgive you for this, ever." Anger took over me. I was walking like I do in my dreams, one step in front of the other, not a thought of the struggles and pain. I anxiously asked the host to help me break camp, mostly because I didn't want to be alone. Within forty-five minutes I was on my way to Philadelphia where my cousin was going to take care of my car, while I flew home.

Flying back home, I realized it was the first time I wasn't afraid. No sweaty palms at take off, only tears. Relief flooded over me, though, when no one sat between me and this quiet man; it meant a pain free trip. So I curled up close to the man and put my straight leg up on the empty seat and closed my eyes.

My wonderful friend Sue picked me up at the airport and took me straight to the hospital. As I walked down the hallway, I saw my entire family with frowns all around. They came up to me with surprise, "I didn't know you would be here so soon," was all I heard. I walked ahead looking for my brother and someone said he's in there, pointing to the ICU doors. I walked in not thinking, "Who are you?" "You aren't supposed to be in here." Then I saw my brother.

Tony picked me up like a twig, "Sister." Then he showed me Kashmeir. I walked forward then back feeling unsteady, when a hand sat gently on my shoulder. My friend Sue whispered in my ear, "You can do it, be strong and don't let her see you cry." I walked forward in a trance seeing a stint

jutting out of her young head. I stood beside her as she looked up, "Weren't you gone?" I smiled and told her I would always be there for her. She started to cry. I soothed her until she fell back to sleep.

I walked out the door and fell into my aunt's arms, wishing they were my Mom's. The next three weeks were a blur, spending most of my time with my brother at the hospital, or in his little trailer. Kashmeir stabilized and I had the choice to get back on my trip. I struggled with the thought of continuing on with my trip, in my empty apartment with no stars or serenity. My brother was the one to give me the thumbs up to leave, so I did.

My fortieth birthday didn't seem as important as when I left for my trip. I had envisioned sitting on a high mountain overlooking the Atlantic Ocean in Maine, toasting to myself, instead I was flying across the country to continue my trip, with a heavy heart.

Letting Go - Unbearable

Gennilla Millan

You had your mistakes
Just when you were little

Those unpleasant surprises
Seemed to amuse me
Being the reason I was never on time,
Just for your morning kisses.

With your golden coat,
Just like a bronze summer tan
I learned to love you
More than the boy next door
Or even my sister at times.

Past joyous memories from
Slightest mistakes
Wasn't the most pleasing but
Endless days we shared,
Had been worth it all at the end.

Till the day you were born to
Very first step you took that day.

Till that day I finally realized

That letting go was the hardest.

I'm just learning to let go.

Moment in Time

Gennilla Millan

Take my hand and lead me to another place
Far away, from a distant past.

Don't you wait any longer for I am frail as I come,
With frail dreams from such passion
More than a snuggle beneath your grace.

As your touch sweeps side by side
Will it be forever lasting till the time has its ending?

Heart to Ashes

Gennilla Millan

Amidst pale ashes
Small as can be.

Once with your golden coat,
Harness for keepsakes tags.

Your breath that was warm
To the touch of my skin
But never yet so pleasing,
I must admit.

Brown eyes with the touch of caramel bring joy when
our eyes meet.

Panting with kisses, chasing your tail,
Or even when you scratch yourself with hind legs up
as you enjoy every bit of it.

It's days like these I wish would last forever.

Red Petals He Loved

Gennilla Millan

I sat in the mist, counting the last rose he ever gave to me.

The 1st red petal told me how much you loved me.

The 2nd red petal told me how much he used me,
And you thought out of all those girls that I would never catch
up to you.

I guess when it came to the 3rd petal, I should have cheated.
The 4th time I should have known we were never meant to be.
The 5th, red petals lay on my lap as I plucked each petal by its
numbers.

Six more pink petals is how much I loved you,
Trusted you and yet you never did the same.

The 7th red petal is what you thought of me.

Eight more red petals are what we were.
Or what we thought we were, was it just lovers or friends?
By then I would have lost count.

As I looked down there were only nine red petals
that's all I plucked by then

I would have only lived to see the 10th red petals to tell you.
That he once loved me but he loves me not.

Autumn Depression

Adam Nadeau

The whole conviction of my life now rests upon the belief that loneliness, far from being a rare and curious phenomenon, is the central and inevitable fact of human existence."

Thomas Wolfe, "God's Lonely Man"

Autumn depression is settling in again, just as it does every year. Summer is long forgotten, those happy memories long lost. The rain is starting to fall all around me and pretty soon I'll be soaked. The rain is so cold. I inhale self-pity and exhale tears with every breath, and just thinking about it makes me feel even more pathetic.

I wish she'd notice me.

Autumn is my favorite season, which makes me wonder if some part of me likes feeling like this. The weather is changing, and I am changing. Days are cold. Loneliness. I have no one for warmth. Nights are colder.

My joy is captured in each of these brittle autumn leaves, and one by one they depart from the branches of my body. They float, spin, flip, slowly falling towards this inevitable direction that my emotions are pulling me. Pulling me down.

The autumn leaves are falling.

I watch her from my corner in the classroom, hoping that she'd notice me instead of feeling so damn transparent. I

feel like a ghost, walking the haunted hallways of this college, scaring young women as far away as possible.

I care for her, I want to hold her, touch her hair, and smell her skin. The fire burns inside of me, and I want us to burn together. If we can't then I feel my heart will melt in the heat, and drip out of my body, and I will have nothing left to keep myself going.

The autumn leaves are fall-
ling.

I feel like she'd hate me to touch her. I am a leper, bound to stay out of contact for fear of infection. My hands are dirty, undeserving of touching such beauty. The hurt wells up inside of my soul, and as my sadness wells up it's hard to breathe. The ground is cold and wet so I stay indoors.

I am losing this battle against nature, against myself. My branches are bare. My branches are cold. It is going to be a very long winter. There are knots in the trees and knots in my throat. Inhale self-pity, exhale tears.

The autumn leaves keep falling.

The Car Ride

Adam Nadeau

I looked up from the passenger seat of her little blue Honda, staring through the windshield while we winded through the sandy back roads of my hometown. Bright golden shafts of sunlight danced through the tree branches over the road, causing me to squint my eyes, feeling warm and comfy in my seat from the sun.

She was driving, wearing a short white summer dress with oversized matching white sunglasses. A few runaway strands of jet black hair were blowing across her shades, and the day was so pleasant she would rather push her hair back every few seconds than close her window. I sat and watched her from my seat, a silent admirer of her beauty. She was smiling, singing along with The Beatles song Love Me Do on the radio. Her face seemed to glow. I don't particularly mean from the sunlight or anything like that, but I sat watching her singing, smiling, with the wind blowing back her soft black strands of hair. Her face glowed in an intangible form of beauty known only by men who have been with an angel, a mermaid or a goddess.

.....loove, love me do.....you knoow I love you.....

Smells of summer flashed by just as the houses did. Grilling burgers, grass clippings, bark mulch, fresh air. I held

my arm out and cupped the wind with my hand, letting it push my arm back against the rubber frame of the window.

As I lit a cigarette with my right hand, her hand reached down and slid into my left. Her hand was so soft and warm. It was as if her fingers were stitched with satin, and her hand fit perfectly in mine, rough and callused from raking leaves all summer.

.....I'll alllways be true..... so pleeease.....

I crawled deep into my mind somewhere warm where I didn't have to think about school, bills, work, anyone else. I was completely at peace. I felt as if I was floating above my body, attached only by a silver umbilical cord type of string. I crawled deeper into my mind and went to a place only I can get to. It was a place where I was with her. In our world we stay in bed all day, talking about books and movies. Work doesn't exist in our world. Just each other. She made me feel powerful. We could conquer the world as two gods, Zeus and Athena, commanding atop our great temple on Mt. Olympus all day and night. I would keep justice over the world and the gods with my triton held high, lightning and thunder rolling at just the sound of my voice. We would have the entire world at our command, and then decide to spend the entire days in our bed together, a giant tangle of blankets and pillows and comfort.

Like a bubble popping I flew back to reality at the sound of an acorn hitting the windshield. It didn't even leave a mark, but it was loud enough to startle me. I looked over at her, almost expecting for her not to be there, only in my dreams, only in my mind. But she was, and I felt warm again and goose bumps trailed down from my neck to my forearm.

McCartney went on playing the harmonica or whoever the hell played harmonica for the Beatles.

We didn't say a word on that entire car ride to drop me off at work, but sometimes the most things can be said without even opening your mouth. I kissed her goodbye, and went out into the real world, where unfortunately, I do have to work. But when I return home, it will be Zeus returning back to his temple, tired after a long night of ruling with an iron fist.

The Outlaw

Adam Nadeau

The smoke formed a lazy cloud at the ceiling of the noisy saloon. Loud and rowdy, it could be most likely heard from the street. The saloon seemed as if to quiet down to a low murmur just as pure evil walked through the swing-out cracked wooden doors. That pure evil was a man, tall and dark, his dusty brown hat hung over his brow to shadow his face in darkness black as death. Warm leather of the holster rubbed against cold metal of the revolver protruding out from his hip. The loud thugs at the tables slowly looked up from their cards, and held their breath, as all that could be heard was a "ching..... ching...." as each dusty brown leather boot hit the filthy wooden floor.

He headed straight at the bar.

"ching..... ching..... ching..... ching...."

The bartender, short with beady eyes, looked like a wax figurine you'd see in museums, frozen in an expression of fear and uncertainty. The hair of the dark faced man was pushed back behind his right ear as he walked up to the bartender, revealing nothing but raging, malevolent eyes on his dark, bearded face.

Without a word the dark man moved with the reflexes of a snake upon its prey, the revolver seeming to appear in his hand, cocked, pressing against the temple of the sweating bartender. The dark man heard the bartender whispering a

prayer under his breath, and he heard the words uttered at the end, "deus ex machina."

Everyone in the bar knew what was happening, this was the third bartender to work there this month. In twenty seconds the cold trigger would be pulled and blood and pieces of skull would be thrown against the wall like cherry pie.

As he stood there at the bar, a light seemed to appear in this dark, smoky saloon, and it caught the dark man's attention from the right corner of his eye. He turned to the bartender's wife so quickly she let out a quiet gasp of fright. As his eyes adjusted to this suddenly bright picture, he saw the beauty standing in front of him. In his mind he figured an angel had fallen from heaven sometime this morning, and probably lost, had stumbled into this dirty saloon, most likely to ask for directions back to heaven. His eyes slowly morphed from rage to reverence for the bartender's beautiful wife standing in front of him.

The first word audible in the last five minutes was spoken by the bartender's wife.

"Please..."

An eternity seemed to pass and the dark man forcibly changed his expression back to anger, wanting not to lose the fear and notoriety he had generated with the public act of mercy he was about to show.

He spun his revolver on his finger and thrust it down into its warm leather holster, turned, and stormed out.

All that could be heard as the bartender and his wife stood stunned in the saloon was the "ching....ching... ching...ching...." as the dark man swung open the cracked wooden doors and stepped out into the daylight.

Absolute Drivel

Adam Nadeau

Most are engaged in business the
greater part of their lives, because the
soul abhors a vacuum and they have
not discovered any continuous
employment for man's nobler faculties.

Henry David Thoreau

Life is what happens to you while
you're busy making other plans.

John Lennon (1940 - 1980), "Beautiful Boy"

Sometimes my thoughts and words try to unite only to emerge like separate blocks that don't quite fit. Like two pieces of a jigsaw that are pounded together because you gave up on finding the right piece. I want them to flow in delicate sentences like a liquid silk, a web woven together in tiny concise strands. In a fleeting moment of revelation. All I have is erudition, trying to pick up bits and pieces of the great minds that have existed, Thoreau, Emerson, Whitman, Greene, Kerouac, Steinbeck, Thoreau(I need to mention him twice).

I hear a ticking, but I have no clocks in my bedroom.

Tonight I drop to my bed in slow motion like a falling domino, and fall through it and into by abyss, floating through clouds of experiences and random thought, getting lost in my own version of my life, the movie. I want to be a writer. But

what is the job of a writer? What part does a writer play, what contribution does he make to society and the good of mankind? Writers must see the world differently than those around them. Most worry about the late payment on their electric bill. Most think about getting the neighbor back for letting his dog crap on their lawn. Most think about tube sock sales at JC Penney and cutting coupons to save 69 cents on a carton of milk and when the new Tarantino movie premieres and why Bill Belichick never changes his sweatshirt and what Britney Spears named her baby and the new coffee machine at work and how many grams of saturated fat are in one serving size of Wheat Thins.

Writers look at the world as a map, as the macro.

Sometimes I lie in bed frustrated with thoughts about what kinds of things are going on in the world above our world, outside the snow globe of our universe. It is nighttime, and I stare at the stars across the ceiling of our snow globe. I wonder if their infinitesimal amounts of light are the little knowledge we have of our universe, which isn't nearly enough to placate me. The night sky is one dark blanket hung over our world and the stars are holes poked through its fabric. When will this blanket be peeled back in a grand ceremony, exposing the light on the other side?

I lie in bed again for the second night. My one fear, above all, is the thought of lying on a deathbed in my final act, right before my curtains close, having a painful realization of having little or no knowledge of the causes of my existence or my stupid little life. I don't want to forget this thought. I don't want to consume water, food and oxygen, giving nothing back except my carbon dioxide and whatever else comes out of my body. I don't want to just be a consumer, unconscious to the constant ticking.

The deathwatch cannot be wound. It slowly edges toward its inevitable goal, and we let life pass by as fleeting as a highway sign, gone, all the while spent trying to feel good. This is our common goal in life. Feel as happy and as good and warm as possible, and fill our minds with useless thought like the fall TV schedule, the prices of copier paper, and working harder than your superiors in hopes of promotion and then making 35,000 a year, the big bucks. Then I can get the Mercedes C-Class, the Rolex Submariner and Brooks Brothers double-breasted suit I've wanted. Until that time I'll keep reading the magazines and newspapers, making mental note of which week-long celebrity marriage is the latest, how to avoid the paparazzi, and (very important) what Tom Cruise dips his French fries in.

The part that leaves me completely nonplussed is the fact that most of society doesn't care to think these thoughts, they don't have much time to think at all between meetings and dinner dates and commercials for deep pore cleansing acne treatment and quilted paper towels(three times as absorbent!).

This world has everything and nothing. And that really is true. This has been a half-hour into absolute drivel. Credits roll. Let's thank our sponsors.

Unable to See

Angela MacKinnon

He's killing her
with his lies
with his truths.
She's caught within him
trying to get loose.
She's stuck
tangled in a web that she helped to weave.
She's scared.
She wants to fly but he's broken her wings.
She needs to go
but she can't see
He's killing her
with his lies but more so with his truths
And she can't see through the storm
Because she loves him
He's killing her.

Untitled

Angela MacKinnon

I can't let go.
Not yet – I'm not ready.
You can't be ready – not yet.
It's been so short a time
 for me,
you –
a lifetime.

You can't let go,
I want you there.
It hasn't been too long,
Grampa I'm scared.
Who will I talk to when I'm lost?
Who will quietly understand?
Who will walk me down the aisle
Or pat my pregnant belly?
No one else can say everything in a simple nothing.

I'm not ready yet,
But I know it's not for me.
I'm not ready yet,
But if you are –
If you must
If it's hurting you

Go ahead and leave.

I wouldn't want you to be in pain

Ever again

So if you're ready I'll let go

I just wish it wasn't yet.

Falling Away

Angela MacKinnon

Darkness
surrounds, smothers, silences.
eats away the insides,
burns with secrets dangerous,
scars the flesh.

So much to say,
impossible to word.
Staring
at the bruises that have begun to creep through
his veins.
Unable to remove your eyes
from the wrinkles of his frown,
the sag of his once muscles.
Scared by the immobility
of one who used to be unstoppable.

So little to say,
impossible to tell.
Holding back,
emotions full
words you long to release
could be so simple
could be so devastating.

So you bite your tongue
and hide your fear,
'I love you' lingers
as the darkness surrounds, smothers,

Silences.

*My Artist of Deceit:
Lyric about Love*

Elizabeth Rheault

Flowing through the misty air
I'm surrounded by the essence of a former life
A golden path painted with the illusion of reds and oranges
Where trees stand poised and weathered
Illustrated by an artist of deception
Peer closer, for they whisper of freedom
From the poisoned winds of deceit which tempest internal
storms

I walk the paths of life through its many seasons
Caught by golden sparks and shrills of color
Entrapped by the blissful texture illustrated through luminous
illusions

All set forth by my artist of deception
Think back
To when I wore Aphrodite's mask and it was you who became
my Ares
Oh they suit us well
Truth be told
My secret lover is he who destroys life

Floating through the misty air
A bare branch brushes through my cold cheek
Suddenly I become overwhelmed, struck with truth
The luminous beauty fades, struggling, ebbing to reality

As tides of the oceans had done that summer
Serenity receding into calamity
The leaves fall
Trees are left bare, revealing scars from a former storm
For your colors of illusion no longer appear
I nestle back to child's pose
These paints so entrenched in my heart dissolve from the
canvas

Floating through the misty air
Surrounded with truth's essence
Which perfumes the air with raw emotion
I slowly rise
Ascending into mountain pose
Eventually standing as one with the ancient trees
Keeping close to heart their position along the path
Entrenched with despair yet inspired to start anew
To Paint a new path
Full of young shades of green, sprouting yellows and real
browns mixed with black
For the young can not flourish and blossom without truth's
nutrients and dark beauty
As with our love.

Secrets of the Heart

Elizabeth Rheault

A Gothic horror story told in the Puritan time period

As I lie upon my deathbed, tragically consumed, engulfed in utter tenebrosity, I await a fate predestined and bestowed upon me from before I was conceived, granted by the great creator who possesses my soul's eternal oath of faith. I lie before him now with my naked soul protruding from my physical being. From the depths of my aching heart no longer can I withhold the sins which seep out along with my guilty conscience. As Jonathan Edwards preached, it is now that I hang by a single delicate thread above the pit of his eternal wrath. It is now I confess the secrets welded into my heart and manifest the evil which prohibits the rising of my soul. A single golden thread from the web of a spider which dangles above the crimson pit of eternal darkness, holds my fate. It is my hope that by releasing my inner demons in this last hour of life, my glowing soul, pure and of genuine conscience, shall rise above this cavern of darkened anguish. A golden candle is lit beneath the indigo sky creating a hue untouched. A wind of malice flails at this fragile light, but it continues to burn as it will until it reaches the end.

There was a time long ago written in the history of my heart when rays glistened down from heaven to touch the lands of purity. There was a time my heart knew not of limits

and was untamed in the spirit of love. My heart belonged to a man whose heart was so pure and genuine that the snake of Eden itself would not dare to approach him. The tides of my heart were calm and the seasons of my youth prolonged. Wandering through pastures enveloped with golden honey-glazed sunflowers, we flirted with our hearts' desires. It was a passion so pure in our own eyes, yet seen in the eyes of our society as sin. This was the time when heaven's rays glistened down upon the turquoise sea and the wind whispered of our untamed love.

Inevitably the fate I was condemned to endure proceeded on its path to fulfillment. Returning on the eve of our departure from town we encountered a soul which would forevermore haunt our very existence. The night air was dense with tragedy. Beyond the ebony sky a purple hue arose from the depths of the land. A misty rain descended from the sky trickling down our faces washing away our fears. The only other sound heard besides that of our breathing was the whining of our horse and the rattling of our wagon's wheels as it carried us to our destiny. In this one moment, passion and desire overtook all sense of reason. We cared not of what lay ahead of us, only of savoring this sinful kiss. With our passion re-kindled of its own accord my love's tension on the reins loosened and our steed, reveling in his newly found freedom, increased his speed to a gallop sending a shiver down my spine. Our moment of passion broken, my love pulled on the reins with every ounce of his strength. Our eyes had no forewarning to the sight that was to come; no gesture of caution had been rendered to us. The path was dark; all that was seen was the river of mud that lay before us. A crippled woman lay struggling to move out of the path of our deliriously spooked horse. My heart was screaming

mercilessly, but not a sound escaped my paralyzed voice. In this moment the angels' voices of song were silenced and God's eyes shielded. I know not what brought this woman to the crossing of our path, but on this night she lay frozen in the mud trampled beneath us. Her face writhed with such an anguish I had not yet seen until now. Where her twisted corpse lay, the essence of my heart lay evermore.

Our love diminished soon thereafter for his guilt became entwined with his very being of existence. A spark ignited with such passion thence fled from the depths of our hearts. A pure radiance of deep crimson laced with gold now was only a hue of pink. What was genuine and pure transformed into the realization of reality, the reality that our love reveled in our sinful ways. We could not find it in our hearts to forgive each other. Instead we simply wandered through life in silence unable to speak the truth of our reality. My dreams are my only memory of that night; my only constant reminder of utter fear, for the crippled woman brought a tidal wave to the tides of my heart and a swift change in the seasons of my youth. It was then that the winds of poisoned fury swept through my wounded heart leaving me cursed and condemned to wander the vast and empty lands devoid of emotion. Render my soul forgiveness and I shall stand in its ominous shadow as to absorb the freedom it radiates.

Freely I have spoken of my grievances, yet still a slave to his wrath of guilt, I remain. The indigo sky now disperses into a pale blue with a pink undertone. My candle has burned through the wax fixture leaving only a stubble of glowing wick. My eye lids grow heavy as time passes; my strength diminishes rapidly with each detail released from my heart. Sorrow wells up lightly from the depths of my heart then ebbs with its

changing tide composed of fear. With my secrets now told to those with mortal souls it may be that this soul of mine shall rise glowing with a pure radiance and assuaged conscience. No longer can these secrets crush the delicate golden web from which I dangle above the crimson abyss.

As If

Dennis Carney

If someday after all be done
I find my heart full of joy
If someday after all be done
I feel as a child with a new toy
If someday after all be done
I can't believe my life was so grand
If someday after all be done
I will find myself holding your hand
If someday after all be done

Fame

Dennis Carney

I sat at the bay windows watching the mist as it transformed the great oak into a ghostly image, and as most ghosts do it soon vanished into thin air. All that remained was a white milky backdrop to the patio in front of me. I recall now a feeling of peace that came over me, at that moment and I realized that I was alone for once. The fog that had obstructed the view of the tree also blinded anyone else in the world that was looking at me. I could feel peaceful and alone, and I longed for the fog to stay, just a while, and give me rest. It had been such a long time since I was able to rest, comforted in the knowledge that I was truly alone. I lay back on my couch and had the greatest sleep I could remember.

I felt a burning sensation in my eyes and I had to cover them with my hands, the bright light of the sun made me squint and scrunch up my face, I guess my rest is over, time to get back to being super human. I sat for a while and read my newest book of short stories from my book club, while listening to the latest CD from my music club. I can't imagine how it must be to be able to go to a store and buy something on your own.

I have been in hiding from people my whole life. My parents were famous and I followed in their footsteps; it is all I know. The only time I get a glimpse of reality is when I'm pretending to be someone else in a movie. I long for those few

moments when the director says action and I begin my craft I am a "regular person", in some cases. I long for those parts when I can play at being a person of unfamiliarity. Some lost soul that searches for the silver spoon and becomes what they dream of.

I am the dream and let me tell you it is not a grand Hollywood ending for anyone who becomes famous. I long to be the person who works the 9 to 5 at some unknown business for someone who doesn't even know they're alive. Nobody, that's who I want to be and I would love it.

I ponder.....

Fancy clothes, world travel, not having to worry about whether you can afford to get through the next month on what you get paid, I would lose all. I would have to clean my own house and cook food. None of these things have ever been taught to me. I depend entirely on others just to survive. I don't even know how to drive a car. I own 6 but can't drive them. What kind of an empty shell of a person am I that I must live like this, and even if I wanted to change, I couldn't, it would take years of training and preparation to learn the basics of human survival in this world.

So I go on making my movies and paying others to think and do for me, with no knowledge of what is happening behind the scenes of my own life. I complain because I am famous and people want to know me and see me. Who am I that I have the right to tell those less fortunate that they can't dream and live vicariously through me and my ghost image of a life. I know all ghosts eventually fade away to nothing and some day I will be left alone. I hope and pray that when that time comes I have saved enough of what I am now to continue till I myself fade into nothing.

Divine

Dennis Carney

Hiding within a mind of confusion
Beneath the watery mist of illusion
Lay my deepest need of all
A woman who won't mind my fall

Hiding from horrors of past incantations
Beneath some dismembered imaginations
Lay a beauty unknown to man
A woman who will completely understand

Hiding beneath those great matted locks
Beneath layers of coverings and blocks
Lay the deepest desire of mine
A woman of understanding divine

The 14th Picture

Angela MacKinnon

"I don't wanna wear a dress!" the little girl whines.

"It's a special day; the church is taking our picture today." Mother explains.

The baby cries, the little boy yells about Sesame Street, the father snores away in bed, oblivious to what he refers to as *her* kids, the mother sighs exasperated but doesn't lose it.

"You want to look pretty for your picture don't you?" in the tone that constitutes only one right answer.

"Yes."

Nearly an hour later, girls in matching red plaid dresses, the boy with a matching red vest, mother in a modest crème blouse and blue slacks, march into the church. On goes the plastic smile that everyone takes for genuine. Play goes the routine of every Sunday's charade. The children bounce, itching to get out of these clothes, oblivious of the adult world.

"I better get them in there before they get themselves dirty" mother says apologetically to the other women, as if it's her fault, her error that she has kids. Mother leads the family into the nursery where a tall, thin man waits. He positions them this way and that talking with mother about colors and prices.

What results is a deep blue background with mother in the middle, baby on her lap, boy to the right of her, girl to the left. Baby stares openmouthed at nothing, the little boy and

girl stare at the Elmo attached to the photographer's hand, laughing in glee. Mother has stiffened in response to "No dad today?" but the plastic smile never leaves her face.

"Not today, business trip." is the lie that drops from her mouth. Below that plastered face lies anger and coldness. Only a trained eye can see the glint in her eyes, the anxiety lining her face, the resentment, the lies, the pretending in her stiff posture.

"Picture perfect for the directory. You have a great looking family here," beams the photographer.

"Thanks."

All smiles, life goes on, the picture hangs in the living room.

Fast forward six years to another family portrait. The little boy and baby still smiling away incomprehensibly. Mother still faking, still so much concealed in those eyes. But look at the little girl, now thirteen. Her smile forced, anger evident on her face. Look in her eyes - that's where the pain lies. Her face has changed, this girl has changed. No longer does she smile, no longer does she cry - her tears dried up from overuse. Now all that's left is the blisters of anger, the bruises of neglect and abandonment, the burns of "No dad today?" Look deep in those eyes, past the rough exterior, past her defenses, past her pretending, past the plastic smile passed on to her.

Can you see how much pain she's in?

Can you see the little girl that used to be? The ballerina who blew bubbles, who sang aloud, who danced without a care, who laughed.

Can you see that little girl, lost, scared, dying?

Can you hear her cry for help?

No one hears.

Another four years have passed; this is the last family portrait the little girl will ever take. Mother sits in the middle still unchanged, still faking it but the kids - the kids are different. The little boy stands to the side, silent, cold, never reaching out, trying to be tough but ever so fragile. Even the baby has changed. No longer is she oblivious, she comprehends so much more than she should. Her eyes harbor anger and a closed off self-reliance. She hurts in the same way the little girl did. She wears the same plastic smile that all those before her have.

The little girl, now eighteen stands on her own, perched on the edge, ready to move. Her face is different, her smile real this time. She is ready to let go. She is ready to fall into whatever might be next.

But, deep in the echo of her eyes live her scars, her bruises, her tears.

Though she is starting to let go, she is never free.

Though she may learn to be happy, nightmares will always wake her.

Though she has grown up, she is still a lost, scared, little girl.

Help.

The Rocking Horse

Sara Williams

In some mill towns, the people made chairs. In others, they made tools. Yet, in Winchendon, we made toys. The Morton E. Converse Co. was the largest toy factory in the world during its peak. The toy company made its home along the Miller's River at the end of the 19th century. The toys produced here became such a staple in our economy that Winchendon earned the beloved nicknamed Toy Town. I suppose that none of the toys became as popular or as influential to Winchendon as the Rocking Horse.

I grew up in this small community as Winchendon reached its apex. Many people came to town by the B & W or by the B & A. In fact, on many days, the mighty train would travel through our town more than two dozen times to bring passengers and take away the goods made along the Miller's River.

The mills along the river sent out many varieties of goods all over the world. At Whitney's foundry, the workers created woodworking machinery. These items were sent as far as Germany, Austria, and Scotland. Woodworking machinery was also manufactured at Mason & Parker. At Folsom, they made their brand-name sewing machines. Piper's made sewing machine shuttles, axes, and light machinery. Surrounding Piper's Manufacturing were houses where many families of factory workers lived. This

collection of small dwellings became known as Piper's Grove.

The goods created in the factories were displayed in the stores that lined Central Street. Everything could be found in these stores. Clothing, cooking wares, appliances and other commodities could be seen as one peered through the storefront windows.

My mother worked at Joseph's. It was a small convenience store that sold everything from the mere essentials to extravagant fabrics and spices imported from the Orient. My father worked in the Converse factory along the river. Their dual employment was necessary as their sons continued their education past the age of grammar school.

As the saying goes, you never love someone until they are gone. I suppose this cliché depicted the feeling between my father and me. As the father-son arrangement worked, we kept our distances. He wanted me to excel in my education, to become a lawyer or doctor to support my parents in their old age. I wanted to travel the world. I dreamed of places foreign and exotic, where the people spoke in different tongues and wore turbans on their heads.

There were always arguments between us. The one that stands out in my mind occurred the night before the accident. Acting like a child, I argued continuously about how I wanted to leave Winchendon. I wanted to see Boston and New York, Paris and Timbuktu. As convincingly as I proposed solutions to such extensive travel plans, my father would not forfeit his claims against my need for discovery. I wanted to leave so I stormed from the house in a fit of rage. I regretted my foolish actions towards my father a short time

later.

One day there was an accident at the factory. There were always accidents, some people lost fingers, some lost hands, others lost arms, and a few lost life.

The Converse factory was fairly strict on the quality of craftsmanship and product. My father was assembling rocking horses on the line. Most of the machinery was openly exposed for access to mechanical problems. When one of the horses fell from the conveyor belt, it became ensnared in the gears beneath. Fearing that the horse would be ruined or that the gears might break, my father reached immediately under to grab it. But before he could reach it, his shirt became entangled, pulling him into the gear works. By the time anyone could stop the line, no one could save my father.

My mother knew when the foreman came, that it was not good news. She had witnessed the dealings between the foreman and wives, watching as they became widows. My mother gathered us in after the foreman left to pass on the news. For a long time, it seemed as if time stood still.

The funeral was small, nothing fancy. My father was not a great man. He liked his gin enough at the bar, but tortured the neighbors on the night following pay-day with rambunctious antics that landed him in the local jail a few times. Yet, those who did come knew my father as a caring individual, willing to help others in times of need. A fond memory was shared following the funeral concerning my uncle's ailment. For a period of nearly a month, my uncle could not retain his balance when he stood. This worried my aunt enough to send him to the doctor. The only stipulation, as in most cases, was monetary in nature. My uncle did not

have the resources at the time to pay for the important visit to the doctor. In the manner in which my father normally told news that concerned family, my uncle found a note in his mailbox. The note told him to go to the doctor at a specific time and the visit would be paid in full. My aunt continued to tell me that that visit saved my uncle's life.

The factory did pay a small compensation fee for my father's untimely demise. The only source of income now came from my mother's minimum wages at Joseph's. Money became too tight to support three sons in school, not in the factories. Between books, paper, and writing instruments, the money would be better spent on the necessities, such as heat, clothes, and food. My brothers were both too young to work and my father would have never allowed for their discontinuation of studies. I felt the responsibility of the eldest male to provide for my family. Thus I replaced my father on the assembly line at the Converse factory.

As I worked in the factory, I came to the realization that it was not terribly unlikely to see foreign and exotic people beside me as I worked or walked from home to the factory. Workers came from all over to find jobs in the mills. Some were immigrants looking for work to support their large families. Others were young women and girls who were not necessarily needed for the family farm work back home. The mills offered an inexperienced worker some form of payment. Still there were those that came because they went from job to job, traveling from town to town, mill to mill, exploring the vast potential of American industry.

It had been three long months at the factory. Winter was setting in and the girls from the farms began pouring in looking for jobs. Many claimed they were promised by

merry men in well-dressed suits employment with ever-growing opportunity. The girls came with the notion that all they needed was to arrive and be guided by the merry men in well-dressed suits.

There was no job security in the factories. The foremen were not selective in their choice of workers. As soon as hired, anyone could lose their place on the assembly line. They felt no obligation to grant the girls from the farms the wages promised by the merry men in well-dressed suits. Yet, the farm girls were so willing to work for money to send home to their families that they would work as hard, as long and as well as men for half the price. So the girls from the farms worked for the price the merry men in well-dressed suits had planned, less than promised.

Her name was Eliza. She stood beside me that winter on the line. She was like the others in the sense that she sent the majority of her salary home to her family, living with just enough to get by. However, Eliza was the one who would help the rookies, especially as the factory expanded, to find materials or parts. She always worked with a smile on her face and a bounce in her step.

The days were long, the pay was poor, and every night I came home with pain in my back from leaning over the assembly line. Yet, every morning I went to work with a smile on my face to see Eliza.

Mr. Atherton Converse, son of Mr. Morton E. Converse, the founder of the great Converse Toy Company, commissioned the toy horse to be built for Winchendon's one hundred fiftieth anniversary. He took some of the workers from the lines to create this massive beast. Eliza and I were chosen to lead the construction. Over the next weeks

we became great friends, working on the horse and deciding the best way to assemble the majestic creature.

The horse was constructed to be larger than life, taking on the appearance of a great gray Clydesdale. The horse was created from lumber taken from the neighboring forests. It was four times as large as the No. 12 model rocking horse, the toy the great horse was modeled after.

The day of the parade, Clyde, the affectionate name given to the leviathan, paraded down the streets of Winchendon on the chassis of an old Chevrolet. Eliza and I stood on at the end of Lincoln Street to watch the parade of cars and floats that commemorate the founding of our prosperous community.

Our pride to see our grand accomplishment stand could not be diluted throughout the day as we visited the numerous parties and celebrations, receiving marvelous compliments from everyone, including the toy maker himself, Mr. Morton E. Converse.

Throughout the day, I began to look at Eliza as more than just a friend. I realized that the more I learned of her, the more I loved her. In a rash decision at sunset beside our marvelous creation I asked Eliza to love me eternally and allow me to love her. She agreed.

The wedding was a marvelous affair in Winchendon. That autumn dressed our day with showers of colorful leaves. Everyone was invited. There was so much food that we ate like kings for days after the celebration. The entire event seemed as if came out of a dream, perfect in every possible way.

We were married only a few months. Everything was truly wonder. We were both obligated to work in order to

afford our little house in Piper's Grove, but the reward was worth the long hours and sore joints. Our little home was adorned with furniture made from the local factories. Some pieces were very inexpensive because they were damaged in such a way that they could not be sold to the worldwide market. We were having the time of our lives with each other. I could not believe how much I loved Eliza and how much she loved me.

Medicines were very basic during the beginning of the twentieth century. Plants that were known to have certain medicinal qualities along with other household remedies were used to cure ailments from headaches and back pain to the common cold. When the illness was severe, doctors would prescribe a drug made from assorted chemicals that might cure the illness. However, people were not safe from influenza, consumption or any other illness brought on by a virus or bacteria. Many died of illnesses that could be easily cured by the mid 1900s.

The winter that year was especially hard. Snow fell, dragging the temperature with it. Everyone at the factory was ill. The gears would freeze from the cold, forcing the workers to crawl on the arctic floor to free the frozen gears from their paralyzed places. The foremen were always looking to hire more people, yet this winter, the need for jobs sent the wages plummeting to nearly half of what they once were. It seemed as if everyone wanted to work in the factory. In some cases, if a worker could not go because of illness, then they were replaced by someone willing to work for less.

Eliza became dreadfully ill one morning. I begged her to stay home, but she was concerned about her job. Against my wishes, she trudged into the Converse factory to work on the

assembly line.

Half way though the day, she could barely stand. I had to bring her home. I sent for the doctor by one of the small boys playing in the street. By the time Eliza and I arrived home, she was unconscious in my arms. She was shivering and sweating simultaneously. When the doctor arrived, he told me he did not know the cause of her illness, yet prescribed a drug from the local pharmacy. He also left the directions to call for him again if she worsened.

I spent the night and next day, caring for her every need. The next night, I sent for the doctor again for her condition showed no signs of letting up. As she drifted in and out of consciousness, the doctor told me to continue to stay with her.

That night, she developed a rasping cough that sent spasms through her tired body. She then began to cough so violently that blood sprayed from her mouth. This worried me intensely and I sent for the doctor immediately. He told me that there was nothing he could do.

The love of my life passed from my life before the next morning.

It has been many years since I saw my beloved Eliza. The great rocking horse of Winchendon has fallen from repair and risen to restoration. The town has not moved, but the people have. The train no longer journeys this distance to bring passengers and take away toys and machines. My life moves forward but my heart and soul stay with Eliza and the great toy rocking horse.

My Untitled

Sara Williams

There are two kinds of people in this world, the happy, cutesy people and the people who hate the happy, cutesy people. Cutesy people are the ones who, when they see a baby, automatically assume the gender. When the guardian corrects them of their ill assumption, they continue to refer to the child using the opposite gender pronouns. Cutesy people are the ones that flutter about, always there as if it is their sole purpose to make everyone's day happy. They LIKE to be called "rays of sunshine." Cutesy, happy people, no matter how corrupt their little lives are, make everyone else believe they are as innocent as the cherubs in the Sistine Chapel.

Then, there are the people like me, who, no matter how much they want to destroy the sunshine that drives the cutesy, happy people, just cannot. It's almost as if they feel sorry for them. Their "innocence" gives them these warped perceptions that everything someday will be A Okay.

Yet, sometimes I want to be like those cheery, cutesy people, the ones that are always happy. It's almost not fair. Well, who am I kidding? It's entirely not fair with everything that goes their way.

Yeah, I wish I could be one of those cheery, happy, cutesy people.

Well, I guess you could say it all began when I was six.

My mother ditched me with my grandmother for the weekend, except that weekend visit never really ended. It just grew into days, to weeks, to months. Then I found myself enrolled in a new elementary school, closer to my grandmother's house.

I blamed my mom for all my problems. She left me. I do remember that our last conversation involved:

"I love you mommy. See you Monday."

"Okay honey, I love you too."

I failed fourth grade and had to stay back. I blamed my mom because she wasn't there to make sure I did my homework. I blamed her because she wasn't there to make sure that I went to school when I left the house. My gram would believe it when I said I didn't have any homework every day of the week and that the teacher just didn't see me when she took attendance.

I was suspended in eighth grade for bringing a bottle of my grandmother's whiskey to school. I told the vice principal I only brought it in because, in class, we were discussing the Whiskey Rebellion. I blamed my mother because she wasn't there to make sure that Gram kept her alcohol out of reach. I blamed my mother because she wasn't there to tell me about the rules of the school.

During my junior year of high school, I was expelled for bringing what administration likes to call "illicit substances" into the school building and then ingesting these substances as my teacher discussed Macbeth. I blamed my mother because she wasn't there to keep me off the streets. She wasn't there to make sure I wasn't using drugs.

Now I can't blame my gram. She did the best she could. I was rotten from the core, she used to tell me. She blamed

my mother more than I did for the way I was turning out to be. I just couldn't stay out of trouble and it was all her fault.

"What about your father?" you might ask. I never knew him. He came and went when I wasn't home or my mom would visit him when she dumped me at my grandmother's. My mom would always tell me how much we looked alike. I wanted to meet him because of the way she made him out to be, how important he was, how wealthy. He became that role model you have when you idolize a made-up figure.

Yeah, my father was a hero to me until I found out he was a washed-up, want-to-be film producer living in a box outside the pub where he spent all his money.

After I was expelled from high school, I finagled my way into receiving my GED and started working for an auto mechanic in town. I think the one thing that kept me sane was cars. I knew everything about cars, from the reason the engine turns to the conversion of liquid fuel into the gases expelled from the exhaust.

I liked the new cars, but I loved the classics. The 1972 Ford Mustang was my favorite. It was my dream car, symbolizing everything classic and good, the long shape, the chrome finish. It wasn't as fancy as the newer models, but it wasn't as fussy either.

Tom, the head mechanic, knew I loved cars and that I knew more about them than most of the trade geeks he got from the local tech school. I'd work from 7 in the morning to 8 or 9 o'clock at night, taking out, fixing, putting back in and then cleaning and polishing.

Life was good, and then my gram died. I hadn't turned eighteen yet, so I had to go live with my uncle, Bob. Bob was an interesting character. The only reason he was saddled

with custody of me was that he was my mother's brother and the only living, legal relative. He was in and out of jail a lot, usually for small offenses, like borrowing stop lights off the corner for a rave and cursing at a police officer when he stopped to give him a ticket.

Bob let me do what I wanted for the most part. Yet, with this freedom, he also didn't pay for anything. So now all my money from working at the auto shop went to food instead of that dream car.

I grew used to it though. Until one morning, I woke up to seven police officers in my room. Three had guns pointing towards my head and the others were searching for drugs and stolen goods. I later learned that my uncle, in his latest fiasco, made a plea bargain and told the police he had an accomplice that hid all of the paraphernalia. According to my uncle, that accomplice was me.

It seemed forever in jail. Now, I was not a bad person. I made some poor choices, but people around me made disastrous decisions. This I also blamed on my mom. If she hadn't left me, I wouldn't have been in the state I was in.

Do you remember when you were ten and everyone would ask you, what do you want to be when you grow up? You'd reply something good, like, I want to be an astronaut or a doctor or a cowboy. I can't remember what I replied because I don't think I was ever asked that question. Often, teachers would tell me that I was going to be a criminal, living on the streets with nothing but the clothes on my back. I'd reply by saying that I'll be the on the street outside your house, waiting and watching.

Yeah, those were good times. Some people believe that once you're labeled, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Well, I guess I fulfilled something from my younger days, to become one of society's delinquents.

Incarceration demanded a great deal from me. I learned many tools for accomplishing many tasks that were not legal in any country in the world. All the criminals of society were bottled into this one building. Some of the fights that occurred left others maimed or dead. By the time I was released [on the fact that my uncle's an idiot], I knew how to mortally injure someone by using a spoon. It's all about technique.

I found my mother waiting for me. She was such a sight. She looked the same as the day she had left me. She told me that she was sorry and that what she did was unforgivable but she wanted to try to make it up to me. So I went home with her.

I wanted everything to be all right, but I knew it never would be. I had resented for too long, blamed her for too many problems. I'd never be able to live with her. It was the impossible possibility. As much as I wanted it, I would never be able to have it.

When we arrived home, I found she had another kid, a little girl. She told me she was my sister, Jenny. Jenny was six, the same age I was when mother left me.

That night I slept in my old room with all my old six-year-old things. Sometimes, I'd wake up during the night, thinking of all the wrongs done by my mother. I could never forgive her for all those years, all those things she put me through. I couldn't let her do it again to Jenny.

Jenny was such a sweet girl. She was not cutesy like those cutesy people, but like children, she was sincere in her high-spirits. I knew I didn't want her to go through what I

did. I didn't want her to turn hard and cold as steel in snow. I had to do something.

The next morning when I woke up, I went to the kitchen to find my mother cooking eggs, bacon and hash browns on one of those old ranges. Jenny was sitting there, her innocence radiating around her. I knew today was the day I'd take care of her. She didn't need her mother.

Mother served breakfast and we sat at the table like one big, happy family. Jenny asked if Pops was going to stop by to see me, but mother replied that he had to work. Jenny knew more about our father than I did. Mother was going to pay.

As much as she didn't want to leave me, Jenny had to go to school. It was a sweet sentiment.

This left Mother and me at home alone. She tried to start up a casual conversation about what I had been doing for the last fifteen years. I didn't want to tell her the highlights, but something made me, some respect I still had for this woman who abandoned me, left me without knowing why. I wanted to ask her this burning question, but something wouldn't let me. It was too soon.

The conversation turned to Jenny. I didn't want to talk about the little squirt. I wanted to talk about why she left me. After a few minutes, I realized the reason for our change in direction. She was going to dump her with me. She was feeling me out to find out how I'd treat the kid. She must have done the same thing to my gram. That poor old lady never saw it coming.

She got up to make some tea. I remembered this from when I was little. The same dirt cheap stuff she got at that dollar store outlet or something on the corner of some

nonsensical street.

And then I saw it, the glint of metal. The smooth, hard roundness. It was a spoon. An ordinary spoon. Just like the ones in the big house.

Something came over me. I got up and walked over, took the spoon from the counter and did the only thing I knew how with such a powerful utensil. She fell to the floor, red liquid pouring from the wound.

My mother would not be able to abandon little Jenny. I took care of that problem.

Yet, the situation didn't really work out the way I wanted it to. See, the kitchen window faces the street. My mother was standing in front of her window. A late morning jogger was, well, jogging by and saw how my mother fell. He called the police. They arrived slightly after lunch time, busting down doors to find my mother in her current condition.

In court, they concluded that I was clinically insane, that I needed help desperately, and that I needed to be placed in a sound institution.

The one they picked was called the Rehabilitation Center for the Mentally Unwell at Newburytown. Inside, they called it Crazytown. It was a place where they sent all those who committed violent crimes, yet claimed to be insane.

Sanity was often discussed in these walls. Sometimes, we considered ourselves the sane ones, doing what everyone else wishes they could do and get away with.

Sanity is a relative concept. As sane and rational someone claims he or she is, they each have moments of sheer irrational thought. Yet, they are not thrown into some

institution with serial killers and cannibals ready to tear your heart out, literally.

I still blame my mother. I wish I could see Jenny, but I'm told she's in a nice foster home in Pennsylvania, away from crime and turmoil.

The people I think are the most insane are the cheery, cutesy people. They live in some alternate reality that is, well, not the same as everyone else's. They deny that anything wrong is done to them, that anything ever goes bad. The cheating spouse, the drug-addicted child are never found in the homes of those cheery-happy people.

I know I'm insane. Do you think they do?

*So I'm Not a Sado-Masochistic
Nymphomaniac*

Meghan Thayer

No one wants this heart of mine
This battered, beaten, blemished heart
It's flawed
Yet this world expects me
to offer it to someone
To make the first move in some transaction
Ideally, I'll receive a new heart
and he'll receive mine
I'm supposed to trust in this world full of deception
Every time that I've gone out on a limb
I've been left to hang on my own
Strangled and struggling by my heartstrings
Why must I be the pursuer?
Why can't I be pursued?
Why am I unwanted?
No one wants me in this world of nymphos, psychos
and general cuteness
I'm a prude because I choose not to wear my sexuality like a
neon sign
If I'm not dripping with lust
then I must be a dried up ice queen
So I'm not a sado-masochistic nymphomaniac
and because I'm not –

I'm the weird one?

Names, many suggestions are made

Like there's some magic button

that'll make everything okay

once pushed

What I need is to heal old emotional wounds

NOT make new ones

What I need

is to find someone who'll love me -

love me because I am me.

Time Untaken

Meghan Thayer

You don't seem to know me
You don't take the time to get to know
the real person that I am
I'm not just some sweet rag mop
I have a mind and a heart
I think and feel things you haven't begun to imagine
But you've made your assumptions
Closed your files
Figured you've done all you can

Instead of a thousand miles
Take one step in my shoes
As you trip and fall
Have to crawl
Do you get it now?

Life is hard to understand
Hard to meet such demands
Don't know where to turn
Who to trust
Who to count on when times are tough

You've painted me into a portrait of disproportions

And when I obscure the person held within the frame
You become angry and confused
But to you it's all the same
I laugh, I cry, I rage, I rant, I can be a king and a fool
I love and hate
Like and dislike
I go beyond the general rule

Instead of a thousand miles
Take one step in my shoes
As you trip and fall
Have to crawl
Do you get it now?

Life is hard to understand
Hard to meet such demands
Don't know where to turn
Who to trust
Who to count on when times are tough

But to know this,
you have to use your mind
Ask some questions
Actually listen to the answers
Take the time
Who knows what you might find.

Instead of a thousand miles
Take one step in my shoes
As you trip and fall
Have to crawl

Do you get it now?

Life is hard to understand

Hard to meet such demands

Don't know where to turn

Who to trust

Who to count on when times are tough

Wells Beach, ME

Meghan Thayer

Stretched out across an old blanket from circa 1970-
something

Warm, sunny day

Light salty breeze wafting through the air

Soft, supple, sand squishing beneath my feet

Sounds of the waves crashing

against the shore lull me into a sweet peace

Caught in an Undertow of Despair

Meghan Thayer

All these emotions welling up inside of me
All these nagging little fears
Sometimes wanting to be the hero
Forevermore the goat
Want to make a splash
Thud
Can't hear the sigh of relief
Caught in the screams of regret and self-anguish
How many cuts will I endure
to feel that one moment of elation?
Have to watch my back
Be closed to everyone
Shut myself off
I feel lost in this sophisticated world

It hurts too much to stay
But I can't leave
Torn between anger and sorrow
Trying to move on
Stuck in the road
How easy it seems for some to forget
The echoes of the past
refuse cessation
Can't seem to trust

Feel like a monumental joke
Many have great laughs
at my expense
They fail to see the hurt
to see the tears
I feel lost in this sophisticated world

How do I ask for a hand to help guide me?
Old patterns return
New ones are created
I feel lost in this sophisticated world

Sink or stay afloat
I've forgotten how to swim
I have so much love to share
No one wants it
Or they take
and leave nothing in return
They become angered when it's not there
Sometimes they think it's not enough
Summed up into a genderless side-show attraction
I feel lost in this sophisticated world.

Right Gully

Toby Woodard

Climbing up
Through the vast treeless treelike
At sixty degrees

An awesomely dangerous
And thrilling quest

Grand, white fields
Of old snow
Pervade the threatening northern landscape.

Shaded even by the highest noonday sun
Granite outcroppings
Spot the uninviting terrace

My ice axe claws the restless grain
For another reach.

I hold on

To my life.

I Don't Need Nothin'

Toby Woodard

I don't need nothin'
When I'm out there roughin' it
'Cept Water and aspirin
And Raisin Bran muffins

Oh yes, biggie Snickers
To make me go quicker
Cashews and sharp cheddar
They make me feel better!

No, I don't need nothin'
But some duct tape and moalfoam
Just a little somethin'
To keep the ol' soles whole

Some pipin' hot stew
A loo with a view
Little fire beside you
And a good smoke, too

Plus a shade tree
And sunscreen...
And skies ever blue

I just don't need nothin'

Except a cotton-tailed bunny
Just some warm flowing honey
To give me some lovin'

No, I don't need nothin'

Sonnet #7 (for Nicole)

Toby Woodard

Shall I compare thy smile...to sunset's beam?
It shines in weather fair...on grasses green.
The sun, she shows herself...relies on mood
Your face does radiate – dawn, eve...noon.

Admiring thee from distant world away
If I the opportunity received
I'm not assured just the parlance I'd say
In awe, this vision, I'd be indeed!

If I could gaze into those baby blues
I'd fall in deep to find the soul in you.
If I could be an Appaloosa foal
My secret, deepest, you'd dearly then hold.

My cry, please listen, won't you understand
Just how you'd turn this boy...into a man?

Pride Also Cometh After a Fall

Toby Woodard
Son of BillyGoat

Note From Author: I completed writing the following narrative while still in the wake of terrorist attacks on America. Unquestionably, we must concern ourselves foremost with the welfare of our children, families and country during these uncertain times. Though educating and aligning ourselves with current events is very necessary and encouraged, listening to or watching too many gloomy news reports cannot be good for us. I am asking you to give yourself a break from it all: Go sit in your favorite place, away from the media and take a couple of deep breaths. I'd like you to forget about the evils of the day and allow yourself to relax as much as possible before taking your time to read my story. Please let your imagination join mine as we find ourselves in the summer-ripened Green mountains of Vermont. May God bless you and God bless our country!

An illustrious morning with its resonant chorus of birds and other critters attempted to waken my stiff, hurting body from heavenly slumber. Just as I'm near comatose, it always happens: I fall away, far away into my own fantasia where I float effortlessly above the trail. I feel warm all over and I am grinning, ear to ear. I feel good. Then, as though the mad doctor zapped the paddles to my chest, my over-dependable Ironman beep-beeps much too abruptly and I am revived. It's offensive, really. It is not even something which improves with each passing day. Miserable, irritable, nothing resembling conscientiousness yet, I had, at least,

begun the process of waking up. Glancing down with one half-encrusted eye open, I checked the watch, as though it had made a mistake or something. Maybe I had set it an hour too early, accidentally, and I may resume my uninhibited snooze. Or just maybe, I calculated, it's that day when we set our clocks *back* an hour. No such luck this day, not for me. Admittedly, I even bargain with myself, promising [myself] that I may sleep an additional half-hour, but that I must eat cold cereal for breakfast and pack up really fast, therefore starting at the originally intended time. It's a game I play on most days. This particular day was July 6, 2001, the seventeenth day of my 280 mile, end-to-end Long Trail hike in the appropriately-named Green Mountain State.

It had been a chilly and peaceful night. Although there was ample room in the shelter for me, I favored the privacy, and above all, the quietude of my little Betamid tent.

There is nothing elaborate about its design. It has no floor. Its pattern alternates between large yellow and white triangles. Fellow hikers refer to it as the "Circus Tent." "How cool is that?" I generally remark upon hearing that. It is practical and cozy, especially during a gloomy night of rain. It doesn't weigh very much. It is my home while on the trail.

The true reason I sleep in my tent, however, is to escape lying awake next to some guy who snores like a wild pig. Snoring is a real issue on the trail. In society, it would probably be comparable to lighting up a cigar and chain-smoking in the middle of a crowded aerobics class. It is very controversial. It infuriates people yet no one wants or quite

knows how to confront the perpetrator. While lying on a reverberating plank floor mere inches away from some dude who really saws them off, I experience actual physiological changes: Feelings of rage and hopeless frustration consume my whole being; my throat constricts and I'm nearly paralyzed. Surely, my blood pressure soars through the red zone. The pressing debate is whether or not to speak to the offender and risk the eminent wrath of waking a bear from his slumber, not to mention disturbing the other well-behaved overnight guests. The other two options are to lie there and take it, praying for the dreadful racket to cease before it's time for breakfast or to just go lie down in the bushes somewhere-by oneself. The bushes always look nice enough for me. There had been some dark rumor, among friends even, that I had been one of these despicable persons on more than one recent occasion. It's a good thing that mere rumor does not necessitate the truth!

The outlook for the day was excellent. Some might have described it as a "Class I day." The sun was radiant and the sky, heavy blue. My load was light and I was beginning to get the hang of it all again. At 4,083 feet, Camel's Hump is Vermont's highest undeveloped peak. To summit before lunch and coast all the way down to cross the Winooski river, Interstate 89 and the lowest point on the Long Trail was the day's schedule. It was good to be on the trail.

Before beginning the ascent, I stopped in the shelter to briefly visit my hiking friends. I wanted to chat for a few minutes, wish them a good day on the mountain. I did so, but that was not the real reason for my visit: My ego simply takes pleasure in demonstrating that I am the first hiker of the morning to be packed up and ready to go. As I entered

the camp, I just happened to notice that Norbert had barely started cooking his breakfast and Steve and Phoebe were barely out of their sleeping bags! I wondered if there had been a snorer among them.

Now, long distance hiking is *not* a competitive event; for such reason, do many individuals find themselves on the trail. Each hiker may have his own style and still obtain the common goal. I tell myself this unceasingly, so that if I don't *totally* buy it, then perhaps it will justify that my own method is the most superior! After checking my watch ten or fifteen times, I proudly stepped out of the camp, grinned ear to ear and commenced the day's hike.

After a few short minutes I was scrambling up and over damp and chilled boulders as large as full-sized automobiles. The "Hump" of the Camel, far overhead, entered my view more than once. It beckoned me to tread harder, to quicken my pace. The great mountain drew me closer to itself, like a giant with open arms.

As I climbed higher, I pondered my boots. They just didn't feel right. If they were tires they would be flat. The stitching had disintegrated in a few places and they were not as supportive as what the rugged tread way demanded. The soles, not aggressive enough to begin with, were at least half-worn. that my feet were still waterlogged from the previous day's trudge was the least of my concern, really. For such is the unique character of the Long Trail, no matter what the preferred footwear. "I've only walked about six-hundred miles in these things. Geez!" say I to myself. "And most of that was on the Colorado Trail where the terrain allows locals to hike around the mountains in tennis shoes! It just doesn't seem right to pay \$165 for a pair of leaking Gore-

text boots that aren't even going to last!" I mumbled between my heavy breathing. I wished, just then that I had been wearing the "tree stumps" worn by a fellow "LTer," at which I had marveled only days before.

No sooner had my mind shifted into neutral and drifted into something more pleasurable when I paused momentarily to contemplate a forthcoming boulder, beginning another high stack of them. It was shaded from the sun, dark, and slippery. Looking back, I conceivably could have circumnavigated it; in my haste, however, I quickly stepped with my right foot into the tiniest divot and pulled my left and myself to an even higher and less secure hold. Just then, as though the mountain pulled the granite heap from beneath me, I plunged to the ground. Most of my 215 descending pounds (including my pack weight) landed on and impacted my right foot, which turned violently inward upon touchdown. Gravity continued to pull me downward to a short stop. I believed, but did not accept the stabbing pain in the ball of my foot. "Oh man, cut it off!" I moaned under my breath, deciding I had broken it off anyhow and would be better off without it. Though I lay inverted, as a tortoise unable to right itself, my backpack did cushion my landing quite nicely. I watched the billowy clouds drift slowly above. I could almost float up above the trail into the white fluff. Upon reaching it I would curl up inside, anonymous to the world, and re-enter fantasia. "Ohhh! Awww!" There were tears in my eyes and I think I drooled on myself. Now I was some kind of angry. It was difficult to swallow. A cold drink would be nice, thought I, reaching for my water bottle. I sucked the four drops of moisture from the mouthpiece and chastised myself for

being ill-prepared for the present situation.

To one group on the trail. I had again just recently touted to them, the convenience and benefits of *not* carrying water on the Long Trail. I told them how much weight it saved and tried to convince them that there was water practically everywhere along the way: "If you want a drink, you just stop and camel up," I proudly proclaimed. The usual looks of disbelief and mild shock followed my little commentary. Next came the predictable water purification debate: "You mean you don't treat any of your water?" inquired one seasoned hiker. Another young man, brand new to such discussion, glanced at his wife and cautiously declared, "Honey, maybe we don't even need to mess around with this stupid filter. He thinks the water's O.K." That controversial statement immediately drew a stunning look from the others, including the young man's wife. As I lay beneath those boulders, I hoped for anyone to come along...besides them! My pride was still greater than the pain and I *still* did not have a drink of water, treated or otherwise.

All energy was drained from me; every reserve of strength was used to yell frantically, hoping to summons "Fenway" and "Nails," that they would hear me and return to offer me some comfort and a drink of water. They, along with a cluster of day hikers had passed through here and successfully scrambled over this slippery mass of granite on their quest for the summit, not more than twenty to thirty minutes prior. During those moments it wasn't so much that they would even be able to help me. I merely wanted someone else to know how painful this was! Maybe that would make me feel a little better or at least take my mind

off my present state.

Human nature is that way. We don't want to suffer alone. It isn't that we really want others around us to suffer also. Perhaps we just want sympathy, compassion or simply an understanding of our discomfort. That's exactly the element in group therapy which helps people recover from a number of disabling conditions.

It seemed as though hours had passed as I "oohed" and "aahed," glancing frequently up the boulder-ridden route for my friends to appear. No such luck. It's kind of funny when you think about it. Since my youth, I have always felt safer and more secure than anywhere else, my own hometown included. By this point in my life, I more or less take with a grain of salt, the warnings and words of caution from people before and during a hike. People often interrogate, "Aren't you scared being alone?" or "What if you get hurt out there?" Aside from such warnings, there has always been an entourage of questioning, from *normal* folks, concerning snakes and bears. My usual response to these inquiries is to smirk, uncontrollably, or course, and offer a simple "nope" and a slow shake of the head. I will sometimes make a shocking declaration that "Everything'll be all right!"

When asked these questions by the "local flavor" or tourists ("tourons?!") along the trail, my demeanor may even take on a slight ere of smugness. Somehow I feel elated during such inquiries. I bounce away, smiling, confident of my independence, proud to be experiencing what many common folks believed to be very dangerous. While curled up there in the dirt, clearly injured, I was thankful that those same people could not see me just then! Neither they nor

anyone else could see me; and no one was coming to rescue me.

Finally having regained a petty amount of strength, I peeled myself from my backpack and rummaged through until I found my trusty back-up supply of Ibuprofen and Vicodin. After forcing them down my throat with a tiny bit of spit and one large gulp, I lengthened my two trekking poles to act as makeshift crutches, shouldered my heavy load and began my descent in the direction from which I had already come.

I had never had to hop on one foot before, never realized the degree of skill and balance it required! Only a gymnast with unusual strength would be suited for this task, I concluded. Besides which, I am very right-handed and am fairly ungraceful with my left half. Using my arms, I lowered myself from the first ledge, landed on my good foot and hopped the fifty feet along the edge of the next. Extreme fatigue in my left leg and my racing heart forced me to pause and rest.

I had thought I was beginning to get into shape. Maybe not. It's all relative, anyway, I figured, trying to justify my still pregnant-looking belly. Some folks only walk enough to reach the ice cream in the fridge; well, I thought, that could be myself on certain days. I suppose they had to get out of the car, though, and walk to the ice cream isle to buy it. A large number of people would surely die without its remote controls, elevators and Ben & Jerry-stocked convenience stores. Now, I too *have* to hold the remote and do find Ben & Jerry's to be one of life's finer blessings but I'm not like *those* people, am I? I wondered to myself. I was unsure of whether I wanted the real answer or not. Others

chain-smoked; I liked to enjoy a smoke or two in the evening-time, after the hiking day was done. So What?

That's no so bad, I thought. Considering everything, I was doing all right. After allowing my mind drift into such dialog for more than a few short moments, I attempted to retrieve it and focus on the tread-way. I was out of breath and exhausted but just about anyone would be, under the circumstances.

I glanced back up the trail behind me, in search of an encouraging view of progress. About a one-minute climb above, for a person with two good feet, stood my crippling boulder. It was still within sight! Leaving my backpack and one pole behind, I limped ever so slowly along and back down toward Montclair glen and the shelter.

"Ash!" I screamed. In my haste to reach the shelter, I promptly tripped, painfully caught myself with my disabled foot, tripped and recovered with my good foot, then caught the attention of an on-coming hiker. "Does someone need help up there?" hollered a familiar yet cautious voice.

Always longing to feel independent, I have generally preferred not to ask for help, but rather let things play out and accept whatever that may be, even if "that" may be questionable. Probably what the average guy today would consider to be an emergency, I would rate as mere inconvenience. I've always believed that true emergencies should be reserved for genuine life-threatening circumstances. This was *not* such a case. "Never Cry Wolf" was my motto, but as the other hiker appeared I suppose I relented somewhat and responded, "Yeah, I could use a little help here!" It was Norbert! I quickly deduced that everything would be all right now. I glanced self-

conscientiously at his sunlit face and smiled optimistically.

Norbert was a fellow Long Trail hiker, a Toronto native who spoke slowly but deliberately with a strange-sounding Canadian accent. I had recently hiked and camped with him. He was sensitive to certain things, as am I, and sharing meaningful conversation came easily for us. I learned that Norbert was somewhat of a "loner" too; he spent a great deal of time dreaming of and scheming his next expedition. Just one year prior to meeting him he had trekked across some remote island in the Iceland Arctic. A partner joined him for this particular journey and they met just one other human being during the whole month! He proudly explained to me that they had to trudge along the rocky, barren terrain, carrying in excess of ninety pounds apiece on their backs, at least to begin with. A shotgun, a Global Positioning System, and thirty days of food and supplies were necessary. Norbert shared a story with me about the one other fellow they that they encountered. He had so much equipment along that he was forced to carry half of it for a distance, then return to retrieve the other half, trekking each section a total of three times! On yet another occasion, Norbert's partner convinced Norbert to run frantically, without shoes, down through a field and into a ravine to retrieve their two backpacks and boots, which were being held hostage by Musk Ox. They perceived the oxen as a threat at the time, so his friend stayed behind and "covered" him with the shotgun! As Norbert relayed this story, he made me feel as though we were back there, just me and him (and the oxen!) reliving the whole event. I was thankful that Norbert walked next to me and most of all occupied my mind with stories and interesting conversation.

Part of another of our dialogs went something like this:

"So, Norbert, you got a girlfriend back home?"

"Yeah, sort of. We've been together on and off for about four years now," he replied.

"Wow, you must really miss here when your away for so long, eh?" I inquired.

"No. She's one of the main reasons I go away and as you can see, I'm really taking my time on this one."

I chuckled with understanding. "Well, at least you can call her when you get to town."

"No. She knows better than to expect that; she's used to it."

A long pause followed; he grinned and I could tell that he was contemplating his unusual arrangement!

Like many of us out there on the trail, Norbert's style was unique, even slightly eccentric. Just above the black strap holding his glasses on, rested a two-tone green dishpan sponge, smack dab in the middle of his forehead! It was fastened by a similar elastic, but instead, one of a filthy-white color which wrapped around his head. Putting practicality over style, he swore by his sweat-collecting method. Just prior to meeting Norbert for the first time, he had forgotten his trusty sponge at a previous shelter. I must have grimaced as I was witness to his two hiker friends overtaking him and the grizzly scene which followed: One of them reached into the depths of a murky Ziplock bag and ever so gingerly, by the tips of two fingers, passed it back along to its rightful owner! Yes, I liked Norbert right away.

We paused briefly to update Steve and Phoebe and bid them a good hike to Canada.

I had walked, camped and shared the fourth of July

with them. As they shouldered their packs and turned away, I knew that I would never see them again. That is the mystery, the romance of long-distance hiking. Perhaps it's the uncommitted freedom to have innocent "love affairs" with like-minded persons that draws me to the trail again and again.

After many more rest stops, we would soon arrive back at the shelter; I could smell it. I remember when my hiking partner, during an end-to-to hike of the Appalachian Trail, swore to me that the shelter was "just around the corner." She claimed that she could smell it and I thought she was nuts! It is possible that I was congested that day, but more likely is that I knew she was right but did not want to admit to that little tidbit. Within a hundred yards, depending on its age, a shelter *will* exude an unmistakable aroma; it is a rich, comforting scent of salty wood and earthy soil; it stimulates joyful associated thoughts and beckons the hiker home.

What would normally be a fifteen-minute hike had taken over two hours and felt like four. Practically without pause, Norbert dropped his backpack, leaving me as comfortable as possible, and trotted back up the trail to retrieve my pack and poles. I couldn't believe my eyes: He had successfully returned before I scarcely had a chance to settle in. After exchanging pleasantries with a handful of day-hikers, we wished each other, we wished each other good luck and I, for the last time, saw Norbert off and up the trail. We both had exchanged e-mail addresses: I misplaced his soon thereafter due to my absentmindedness; he has not e-mailed *me*, perhaps due to his eccentricity. No expectations; no surprises.

Now, Montclair Glen Lodge is not the type of "lodge" a modern-day tourist may have in mind: There are no bordering ski lifts nor is there a neat waterside; one may not rent a scooter or a mountain bike for the day; there is no pool or Jacuzzi (though surely no Long Trail hiker would oppose one!) and one would be hard pressed to locate a pint of "Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough." I was reminded of one couple with whom I shared a motel room for the night. Their grievances gave me over to wonder and confusion: Their room contained the wrong kind of coffee, no hairdryer, and there was no store within "walking distance." I chuckled to myself and immediately categorized them as the "ice cream people."

The rugged young men of the 1948 Long Trail Patrol constructed the Montclair Glen Lodge; each supporting foundation stone was moved by human hands and every log and beam was hand-cut, hewn perfect to fit together firmly; its air-tightness, strength and competence have held out a half-century of arctic weather elements and endured a myriad of clumsy hikers; learning this revealed to me the degree of care that a few young men once gave this place.

Upon unlatching the creaking door, I stepped wide-eyed into the all-in-one living, dining and sleeping quarters. Though I had allowed a little light to enter, my eyes adjusted very slowly. I was promptly entertained by watching a miniature gray field mouse with an overstuffed belly vault off the table onto a bunk. It still had the crumbs of some hiker's peanut butter sandwich hanging from its lip, even as it slipped and skidded across the smooth surface, pulled a Peter Pan right onto the floor and scurried into a crudely-chewed hole. Upon closer inspection of the inside walls and

ceiling, I spotted a legion of modern art: "Brett loves Heather-6/2/82," "Grateful Dead" with the appropriate symbol and "Legalize Marijuana" carved inside its matching leaf. These creations, when still fresh and obvious, are looked at with disdain but grow historically more significant with each passing decade. On a July, 1992 hike of the Long Trail, while lazing around inside a similar, antiquated camp, I glanced over to the outside wall and read "John Howell, 7/4/42." Amazing. At the height of the second World War, some fellow was way up in here, probably all alone, and on the fourth of July, at that, I marveled. "Wow. What must have been going through his head that day while whittling his little insignia?"

To the far right was the table, built flush against the wall, just under the windowsill. One side of the table was a bench; seating for the other side was the edge of the lower bunk. This style, very typical of Long Trail design is efficient but above all is tailor-made for the hungry, weary hiker; upon scraping the very last macaroni elbow from the corners of his pot, he may drop his beloved spoon, expeditiously slide away from the table and recline for the night. For one who wishes to sleep with his head toward the table, he must only swing his legs around swiftly, scoot forward and recline for the night.

Either method demands that the hiker move his body just inches. Truly noteworthy here is the optional step of first removing one's hiking boots; in no other setting known to man, could this go as unnoticed as it does here.

I have customarily slept with my head at the far wall looking out of a shelter; it had always seemed logical to me. I could lie there pretending to be asleep, looking on through

squinted lids, at the others in the lean-to, adjusting their sleeping bags and readjusting layers of clothing. No one at home would position his headboard in the middle of the room somewhere, so that his feet extended to the wall or a window. Secretly, I had once looked on at hikers who slept in such an inverted fashion with slight disdain. Were they trying to protest conventionality? Why couldn't they just be normal and sleep with their feet next to my feet instead of my face?! Such were the ponderings of my feeble-minded youth. In later years, as no one was looking, necessarily, I experimented with this unconventional sleeping style. The increased sunlight, with my head resting at the open end of the lean-to, allowed me to read considerably longer in the evening and wake earlier in the morning. I also found that my head was comfortably higher than my feet—just the way it supposed to be! This is the case in many aged lean-tos, as the bunks tend to sag inward due to years and years of stress. Though somewhat firmer, I suppose the body depressions would be comparable to those in a conventional mattress. Rotating *these* bunks, however, would present quite an ominous task! As I am now a measurably more flexible and open-minded individual, I allow my body virtually any suitable resting position at the end of a long day's hike!

The bunks sleep eight persons comfortably between the narrow wood-slat dividers or eight rather intimate *couples* could nestle aside one another if, say, a tornado or volcano demanded it. The caretaker slept on one of the bunks and made the shelter her home for most of five months! I noticed that she had fashioned several accessible, hanging tuna fish cans; most mice outside of Maine, anyway, are very intelligent but not quite skillful enough to

circumvent a tuna can on a string. This arrangement almost always protects the hiker's food bag through the nighttime hours. The wooden "storm" windows were pulled upward, into the room and fastened by crude re-tied strings to nails on the ceiling beams. This drew a pleasant breeze through, but the room was still gloomily dark, despite the midday hour. Had I carried a flashlight, I would have retrieved it to inspect the mysterious, unidentified morsels left at the far end of my bunk.

I entertained weekend guests throughout the afternoon. Since the caretaker was still on the mountain I assumed the responsibility of host. I chatted with folks cheerfully; I responded facetiously to questions relating to weather, trail conditions and my foot; I made a few tired souls chuckle, thereby distracting each of our minds from present discomfort, at least momentarily. I fantasized that the place belonged to me; I dreamed that the shelter was my own home along with the surrounding land, with its rich population of lively critters and babbling streams; I considered how good it was of me to allow all these people to come and go freely on my property.

My persistent work paid off: A group of three couples tenting out for a night invited me to dinner; we had wildly-colored stir-fry on yummy noodles and a bowl of crunchy cucumbers mixed with fresh tomatoes. Then, soon following after-dinner chat, I retired to my bunk. I had to fake being asleep so that the resident blowhard would stop brashly forcing everything that he "knows" upon me. Though he ceased his rant with me, he simply shifted gears and revved up on the poor others who hadn't yet made it look as though they were asleep, like I was. When his mouth was still

spewing immeasurable empty syllables after *two more hours*, I resolved that this jerk was one of the most self-absorbed asses I had ever been forced to bear. At that point, I was ready to hire someone to pitch my tent for me and carry me up the side trail to the tent platforms. I was hardly asleep when my body jerked awake; the know-it-all was sound asleep on one side of me, thank the Lord; but the fat guy on the other side snorted and rumbled through each breath like something I don't *ever* remember hearing before. I stuffed my ears with toilet paper; this was merely a reminder that I had forgotten one of my most important pieces of equipment: My earplugs! "Hey, hey man. You gotta stop snoring! Turn over or somethin'." Was this schmuck trying to tell *me* that it was *I* doing the horrible deed?! Though bewildered, I managed to fall asleep again until awakened by the same, now all-to familiar disturbance and the same vicious cycle went round and round, hour after endless hour. I lay there tossing and turning; I grew more tense with each disruption; I listed many things in my mind that I wished to do to this guy. Surely, I wasn't the only disturbed overnight guest; there were murmurings from a couple of others in the camp, too. The fat guy and I must have both fallen asleep several more times; the caretaker grumbled a few unrepeatable phrases and yelled down at both of us, more than one time. Lying there, imprisoned in the blackness, ankle throbbing violently, I was certain that some tragic world occurrence had taken place and morning simply was not ever to come.

Eons later, just as soon as all of us were asleep together, morning *did* come, leaving several red-eyed casualties. I took down my food bag and stepped out into

the light to have cereal and dried fruit for breakfast, next to the fat guy and his partner. The three of us made believe not to notice that the caretaker was still asleep; she was not only asleep; she was curled up in her sleeping bag with some guy, on the large, flat rock directly in the "front yard" of the camp. I thought that the guy who had [tried] to sleep next to me was either about to chastise me (since he apparently had mistaken me for someone snoring!) or apologize for his own tree-cutting. Because of the "scene" on the rock, his face turned flush and he smirked, glancing over at me. "Dude, you can really cut 'em off. You snored all night long but it's all right, because I snore too."

"This cannot be happening," said I to my disgusted self.

The caretaker gave immediate attention to my ankle just as soon as she accomplished a couple of other things of apparent higher importance: Although everyone was up and about, she found it necessary to sleep a good while longer; perhaps the mysterious man, to whom she was snuggled up could not stay warm by himself; I guess he needed the caretaker's "hands-on" wilderness technique! Once the sun was too bright and the voices, too loud, at the relief of many of us, the two finally arose. Her beau haphazardly threw his stuff together, never saying a word, and jogged away, just as slyly as he had appeared. Miss caretaker dragged her sleeping bag and herself back into the camp, and to bed...again! It's sure a good thing that the Green Mountain Club has this caretaker system, I concluded, and I'll even get to pay my five dollars for services rendered!

At some point during the mid-morning, she dragged her body from the clutches of her sleeping bag, as the three

of us looked on with wonderment. Peeling off my hazardous socks, I asked the caretaker girl if she wouldn't mind taking a look at my right foot and ankle; although I hated to bother her, I needed a helpful solution for getting out of there, sometime before summer's end. My foot was swollen to at least half again its normal size and was painted with deep swirls of black and purple. It was kind of neat, really. It would have been cool if I could have punctured my overblown foot with a sharp instrument and watched it burst forth foot stuff all over the caretaker lady. She assisted me in fashioning a makeshift splint for me; we fastened it around my foot and ankle and stuffed it full of material oddities: My backpack rain cover, a couple of bandannas, some still-wet, rotting socks and much other miscellaneous paraphernalia. We wrapped green, Hefty garbage bags around my now enormous member. We then reinforced it with a generous amount of duct tape (most important item in the first aid kit!). "Big and ugly. Real big and ugly." That's what makes a real good splint out here," so the caretaker hurriedly informed me, as though I was wasting her important time. Her snobby attitude assured me that she had *much more* important things to do. Unfortunately, I failed at my challenge: I only wanted her to look me in the eye-just once. Poles in hand, I was now ready to limp and hop my way down the side trail to Huntington and complete the next step toward the hospital emergency room.

I looked either exceedingly pathetic or had done even better than expected at courting the group of six the evening before; they had offered to divide the contents of my backpack and tote them all the way down to the trailhead and their waiting automobiles. Upon readily accepting, I felt

warmly encouraged by the generosity of these "complete strangers" and somehow grateful for this whole experience.

I moved out nearly as slowly as I had arrived; I dragged my monstrous foot along and flinched in pain each time I had to put a little weight on it. The inconvenience and soreness were insignificant in comparison to the prior night's horror show. My spirit began to soar again. I was still on the trail! If each one of us has his own pace and style, then this was now mine, I deduced. The sun warmed my face as I walked through alternating patches of lighted and shaded forest. Hiking conditions were absolutely optimal. No matter how long it took, I would savor every last step of these final three miles through this dearly beloved place.

In between short rest stops, I followed an increasingly gentler path, descending from softwood into hard, from boulder-strewn to fairly graded. The perfect weekend day beckoned many folks up the same approach trail. I knew a party was approaching behind me when an over-excited dog, barreling up the trail, nearly pummeled me over. Though a bit over-friendly, I took the time to greet and welcome each and every one of these furry friends. Canines, when un-threatened, are loving by nature and always indiscriminating; it makes no difference whether one is joyful or sad, freshly showered or missing a limb. A dog is happiest while pleasing its owner: In giving a command or asking more of it than usual, it will generally respond with raw enthusiasm. What more could you ask for in a hiking partner?! I had experienced this type of relationship the summer before, having the privilege to walk for a few weeks with a well-trained and behaved Husky/Border Collie mix called "Sam." Encountering a good number of "man's best

friend" that morning reminded me a great deal of Sam; I missed him and longed to have such a partner and buddy again. It is my dream to have my own canine. I am particularly drawn to female Rottweilers. She would be my family, just as my mother or sister is my family. It is just such a shame that there are so few places to live, where having a dog is allowed. Nevertheless, I will *never* lose sight of my little fantasy...

All types of people were on the trail: From old to young, skinny to fat, and from marathon runners all the way to the ice cream people. It was refreshing to see so many kids on the trail. Many of them stopped to chat with me, mostly to let the adults catch up.

As one girl approached, staring at my voluminous foot, I quipped "Yeah, I took a pretty bad fall. The caretaker thought it best to just amputate it; so she did." She paused just long enough to exclaim "Whoa!" before scurrying away from me. Many folks stared; some made believe not to see me, which was similar to the hitchhiking experience and yet others disseminated "the perfect advice." If there were such device as a "know-it-all" warning which could alert an innocent victim far ahead of time, I would doubtlessly own and carry one. To think, it might have saved me twice already from the prophetic "Now I'll tell you what you need to do..." Ugh.

Although it took several hours to reach the parking area, my volunteer Sherpas arrived after me. I wondered at what time they had left Montclair Glen but they didn't choose to make it overly obvious how long it had really taken them to reach me. Upon gathering my gear together, I was whooshed away at what seemed like jet-speed and

within an hour or two, I was in the hospital emergency room in Burlington. Had I been physically able to walk there (but then, of course I wouldn't have needed to get there in the first place!) it may very well have taken two full days.

After the doctor sat me down as though I were going to have a baby, he reported that I had pulled ligaments and tendons, which run from my ankle into my foot. He assured me through many scrambled words that I would not be able to backpack for a *minimum* of six weeks. Surely, he must have examined the wrong x-rays and was gravely mistaken; what I needed was foot replacement surgery and I also needed to be back on the trail in two-to-three days. O.K., *four* tops!

My Long Trail hike was over, at least for a time. I had proudly dubbed it my "Homecoming Hike 2001." I had trampled this trail before. I had befriended its visitors and those who cared so much for the well-being and upkeep of the trail; I had fallen in love with her rustic old camps. I had a relationship with the Long Trail. In one sense I feel as though I've *grown up* on the trail. It's hard to deny that I have, in many ways. Perhaps returning to the trail for me, is just a revisit to some old stomping grounds. But it was over; I had gleefully anticipated this joyous time of reunion and reflection, but as quickly as the trek began, it *really* was over. I suppose that time pauses for no one...not even me.

As soon as I navigated my wheelchair out of sight from the hospital lobby, I hit a straightaway and opened 'err up! "I'll be back!" I bellowed. "I WILL be back!"

The End

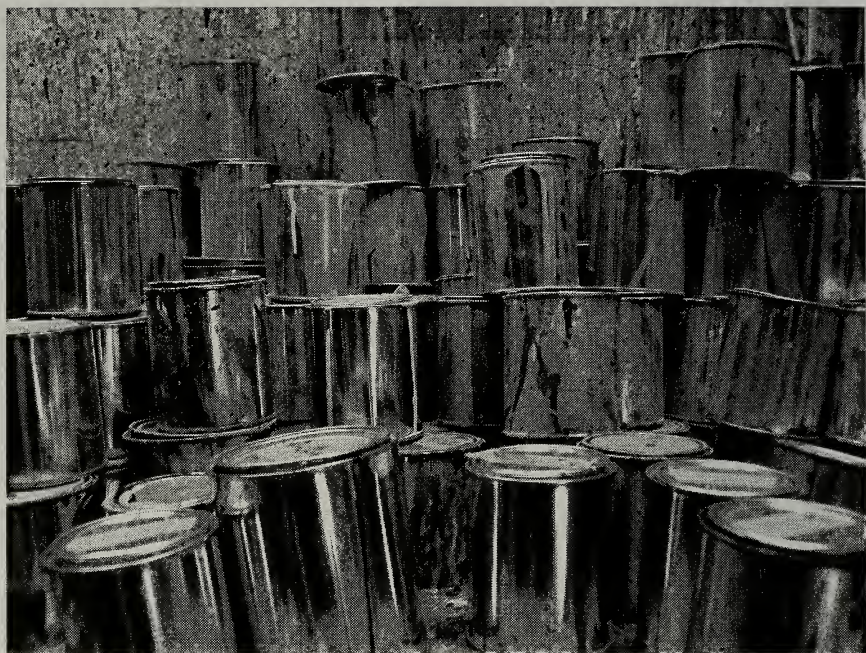
Postscript from author: After faithfully enduring and completing twelve weeks of physical therapy for my sprained ankle, I was able to resume my hike, exactly at the point at which I had left off. Approximately two weeks later, I reached the Quebec border, making it now three total journeys, for me, from Massachusetts to Canada...



Kathy Cronin



Kathy Cronin



Kathy Cronin

from the other side
of the mountain



poetry and prose from
mount wachusett community college
alumni

Number 14

Shawn P. Bernard
Class of 1998, General Studies

A holographic model of reality
Allows for each possibility
To be an echo of itself

Allows for the mind to think itself
into
And out of
Existence.

Enables an otherwise empty physic
To be an endless self-solving equation
And reflects the ineffable beauty of creation.

Pregnant Pause
(Of Poetry, a Girl, and Myself)

Shawn P. Bernard

And the negative space
which binds it all together
takes a second breath,
and elongates the explanation
of possibility
 in the mind
 and body.

Creates a connectivity
Which turns I and Thou
 Into I and I.
And I and It
 Into I am That

The negative space holds it all;
Inside its perfect uncarved emptiness.

He sat and thought...

The differences were fundamental;
but equally beautiful.

One was like Buddhism
One like Hinduism

Buddhism was grounded
Low frequency
Low humming vibration
Put roots in the ground
And thrived.

Smelled like clay
Appeared ancient like Bonsai
Held form, like water.

Hinduism was vibrant
Multitudinous sensation
Extreme taste, touch, sight, sound
It was aromatic and drenching
It carried you around the universe.
And lit you up as you moved.
And made promises
And kept promises

And in time
Both were present
Both were blooming
And they both wept
in the night.

And in time
I walked on water.
And saturating my mind
In the vibrant vibration of the heart
Turned one hand down;

And in the negative space
Which binds it all together
came undone.

The Whole Envelope of Time Slowed

Shawn P. Bernard

First Poem for JBLS in Honor of Our Awakening

The whole envelope of time slowed
And the room around us appeared crisp and pure.
We sat on the floor
Like eternal children
 And using the voices of the gods
 Spoke truth like an angel's song.
 And heaven spilled from our eyes.

It was the moment
 When I noticed the movement
 of breath
The way your shoulders rose
 Against the pale wall behind you,
That the spirit of being announced itself
 And using the heart of the gods
 Touched you for the first time
 And understood your truth.

Language welled up inside me.

And opening my lips

Spilled out

And washed over us.

And using the hands of the gods

Gathered beauty like blooming flowers,

And slept in the garden bower of your soul.

And rising from our blessed perfection

Watched the world awaken

And with the sorrow of the gods

Felt the balance of life around us

And our hearts wept

And scales fell from our eyes

And we mourned

the filth

of progress.

Poem for Howard Zinn and a Girl

Shawn P. Bernard

Your breath moves across the page
The great wind of imagination
Your mind slaughters the emptiness
Leaves clean cuts of purity

Your eyes make me whole
The smell of your skin
Your mouth makes me unafraid
Fingers touch invisibility

Inside I sit like granite
Enormous
Textured

To move makes quaking ripples.

Number 22

Shawn P. Bernard

My mind is a paper lantern,
Simple, bright,
sensitive to the forces around it.

Often, it sways
sometimes spins
or sits dead still and scalding.

At times it moans
as fire from flames within it
roll at the thin crumpled paper of its being

And always
when a chorus of rain dances down upon it
It celebrates, in laughter
at the certain prophetic promise
of eventual extinguishment.

Untitled

Tammy Haney
Class of 1989, Human Services

The river has swollen
The shore laps, laps
The ripples trill and trill

The words have awoken
From their lapse, lapse
And they thrill and thrill

The current is burdened
By the stones, stones
Their spray is thrown, thrown

The banks are heavy
And lush, lush
The stretching is hushed, hushed

The pregnant shores
Are growing, growing
And I my life am owing, owing

The depths have reached
A turn, turn
The course no longer burns, burns

The brown water, white
And wild, wild
The current of a child, child...

Untitled

Tammy Haney

This writing I oft thought
Withering,
Lost in honesty and
Propriety
Responsibility and nurturing

And what of myself?
The spirit has not left me
Nor the sign
As it is here
Spreading like wings beating against
What I have let be...

If from the source
I take solace,
It shall only be gone
If I have left it...

No one wakes me in this marble maze
Nothing quakes within me
As knowing the thought
That if I have forgotten myself
It is no one's fault
But my own...

Untitled

Tammy Haney

Dedicated to Anne Sexton

Death
No pretense
And a truth so harsh
It became fatal to your sanity
Leaving you to finally,
 Finally,
 Succumb
To revel your body in the black
Of an eternity of the unconscious

Dying
You may have gasped
But I doubt not thought again
Or better
 Of no surer method
The way your fingers stretched
Was undoubtedly not in the way of
A life so plagued with death
 That you were only free
When yours were the fingers that,
 Outstretched to the ceiling
Or the floorboard,
 Eagerly

Contemplated the rush of death
And finally touched the destiny
Your troubled mind so often
Lurked in the darkest regions of your soul
To churn
And finally
The yearning to meet the end
Was realized not early enough
For, the only day you walked on
Sunshine
Was when your sun,
You at last
Put down.

Untitled

Tammy Haney

You remind her of someone she used to know
Someone from long ago
A girl that smiles, makes things right
A face that comes with the light.

Some times are bad, the darkness deep
Confusion is a fence, barbed and steep
She tried to climb to find a bed
Strangers coax her back from the edge

Yes she had a life
A husband, she a wife
Or was it someone in her memory?
Like the silly melody

That girl comes with the light
The one who pats her fragile white
Hand with skin like gauze
What is that cause

Of loss, time and season
Days, moments without reason
Yes confused I am
Not like then

The young, the old
I am one of them I do not know
The girl that sees me will tell me
I do not wish to see myself.

Untitled

Tammy Haney

Like those falls
That below lie the rapid
Quakes,
Like the dunes
Still
Yet drifting from one
Likeness
To another.
Perhaps the rainbow
That while it knows
Its colors
Will realize it will go
And also the trees
Swaying
While some tear
And are swallowed
Into the winds...
But are always
The shell
Showing only the
Courses of beauty
And hiding
All the truth...

To My Town From Your EMT

Patricia A. Breslin-Zirpolo
Class of 2000, Nursing

Sorry if we woke you in the middle of the night.
But someone in your neighborhood is fighting for their life.

Sorry if we block the road and make you turn around But
there's been a bad accident with someone lying on the
ground.

When you see us coming and when we think we are alone,
You'll know we've had a bad one and we're feeling mighty
down.

You ask us why we do it: "How can we watch someone die?"
It's never very easy, but we'll try to tell you why.

We don't do it for the money, you know we don't get paid.
We don't do it for the glory
But for a life that might be saved.

Somewhere deep within us, our souls are crying out We're
here to help our neighbors In their hour of pain and doubt.

God gave us something special

To help us see you through
We do it 'cause we love you
And we care about you too!

The Loser

Robert A. Hall

Class of 1970, Liberal Arts

I ordered a round of drinks and nodded for the barmaid to include the boys at the Thursday night poker table. "Thanks, Jim," the usual suspects sounded off. Drinks are cheap at the VFW, so buying rounds is SOP.

A former sailor we called Doc limped over to collect their beers. He has a ruined leg, but the other guys let him hobble for the drinks. Doc takes offense if anyone helps him. Foolish pride, I think, but it's not my business.

The other players were Eddie O'Leary, a Marine Vietnam vet who owns a small commercial printing company over in Pennsauken, and two retired brothers, Tony and Sol Tomasino. Like me, the Tomasinos are Korean War vintage Army types. They had family money from tomato processing someplace further south in Jersey. The game was too rich for me, and I wondered how Eddie afforded it, since it wasn't unusual to see him drop three or four hundred bucks, pretty steep for a friendly game in a small town.

I knew Doc mostly lived on his disability pension, but he didn't have to sweat the cost of poker, because he always seemed to win. Usually the game was these four guys, with occasionally a couple of others. Once a smart guy from

South Philly dropped by to play, eager to take the hicks. The local boys picked him clean.

Setting the beers down, Doc wrenched himself into his chair, wincing at the pain. The other players pretended not to notice.

There was a large stack of ten-dollar chips in front of him, and I surmised Doc was having a profitable night. Eddie complains about his bad luck, but in poker only skill wins consistently. Which is why I don't play with Doc. My pension from the state doesn't stretch to dropping a couple hundred bucks a week.

Doc picked up the cards and dealt seven stud, with a Jack up for Tony, a trey for Solly, a seven for Eddie, and a King for himself. He flipped a chip into the pot. Tony and Eddie called, Sol folded.

In the next round, Doc caught another King. His bet drove Tony out, but Eddie raised. He had two clubs, probably chasing a flush. Doc eyed him and called.

On the following two rounds, Eddie caught red cards, while Doc paired up sevens. Eddie couldn't have the flush yet, but he continued to bet against Doc's strong hand. The pot was almost two hundred dollars.

Doc dealt the final round, and Eddie peeked at his last card. "Busted!" he said disgustedly, while Doc raked in the chips. I shook my head, thinking dumb Marine.

So it went, Doc winning, Eddie and the Tomasinos losing. Then Sol dealt Jacks-or-better. Doc opened, both brothers dropped, and Eddie raised. Doc called, and they each drew one card. I could see Eddie's hand over his shoulder—two pair, Queens and nines. And he drew another Queen for the full house. I figured he had this one.

Doc bet ten dollars, Eddie raised ten, Doc raised back, and Eddie, to my surprise, called. Doc laid down a heart flush. "Damn!" Eddie swore. "Beats two pair." He showed only his original hand, hiding the third Queen, then quickly shuffled the cards. I almost fell off the barstool.

An hour later the game broke up. Doc bought a round of drinks and headed off, painfully climbing the stairs. Eddie put the cards on the bar and sat beside me. I picked them up and shuffled through.

"I always knew Marines weren't the brightest bulbs on the tree, Eddie, but you're the first guy I ever saw cheat himself," I said. He looked at me funny, then glanced quickly around as I tossed three Queens on the bar.

"You got to keep this quiet, Jim," he pleaded. "It's like this. Doc was our company corpsman at Da Nang. What you Army guys call a medic. Anyway, our patrol got caught in a rice paddy by a machine gun. Three of us were hit, pinned down and hurting. While the other Marines fired at the VC, Doc ran out and dragged us in, and we all came home alive. I was the last guy, and his luck ran out. The machine gun caught him just as he got me to cover, and he was hit worse than any of us."

I tried to interrupt, but he went on, angry now, face hard. "You know what he got for it? A Navy Cross, a stinking little pension—and a body so tore up he can't work much. That leg ain't the half of it."

"And the poker?" I asked.

"One of the guys whose butt Doc saved is now a banker in Atlanta, the other's got a construction company in Ohio, and I'm not doing bad either. Thanks to Doc, we got kids and families and good lives. He's too proud to take any

help from us—but he's always loved to play poker with dumb Marines. So the other guys send me betting money every month."

"How'd you do tonight?"

"I lost over three hundred to Doc, but I took seventy off the Tomasinos," he said. "So for a dumb Jarhead everybody thinks is a loser, I think I did okay."

Eddie finished his beer and left, after getting my promise to keep his secret.

I ordered another Scotch, thinking the dumb Marine had done pretty good, at that.

Stories from Home

Wanda Pothier-Hill

Class of 2001, Liberal Arts and Sciences

Sometimes the stories Mama tells me in her old age are hard to take...how as a child she was chased down by her father and beaten for sticking out her tongue at an aunt...how she was the middle child and just seemed to keep getting in her father's way. When she was little more than a toddler, he locked her in a darkened closet once and refused to let her out, despite pleas from her mother who called, "Okay, Earl. That's enough now. Let her out. Please Earl...." She can't recall why, but instead says she must have done something very naughty, that she was too young to be spanked, but too old to go unpunished.

Quite often, when the night grows old and dark, she looks lost in her thoughts. These are her moments of reverie, the moments when she begins to pass the time away with stories from home. It is late, but she can't sleep. Her mind is filled with memories, both good and bad, that leave her restless. Often, I sit with her after the kids have gone to bed and the dishes have finally been put away. I pull the last plate from the dishwasher, shake off the few remaining drops, and then place it in the cupboard. Looking at Mama, I can see she is lost in thought again. She catches me looking her way and smiles. There is a strange mixture of radiance and sadness in her eyes.

She begins to tell me about her baby sister, Doris, who passed away quite a while ago. Leukemia took Doris from her family at the young age of thirty. Mama tells me that she was beautiful, the most beautiful girl in her family. Doris was blessed with an engaging smile, long strawberry-blonde locks that hung well past her shoulders, and a well-endowed bosom. She was the youngest of the girls and the most outspoken too. Mama tells me that she was always catching the boys' eyes. Doris had a way about her, a special kind of genuine charm that made all who met her fall in love with her. When Mama tells me this, there isn't the slightest hint of jealousy in her voice, just admiration and affection. I can see, looking into her green eyes, that she still misses her, as though Doris was lost only yesterday.

Doris married a solid young man with devilishly good looks and frosty blue eyes. They had two children together, and before the oldest reached six, Doris knew something was wrong. "She told me that she would never live to see her children grow up," Mama says and lets out a sigh. With a shrug of her shoulders, she reaches for her glass of wine. She sips it daintily, extending her pinky in the manner she has held for so long. She tells me again that Doris was right; she never saw her thirty-first birthday.

It was Doris whom her father held the most affection for. She was his cherub, and everybody knew that, including Mama. But if everyone was seduced by Doris's charm, so then was my Mama. It is not that her father didn't love his other children as much, Mama assures me, it's just that there was a closeness, a special bond that existed between her father and Doris. When Doris died, a piece of my Mama went with her. She and her sister Margie, along with their mother, and three brothers, grieved heavily at their loss.

Mama tells me that her father never cried...at least not when it happened. It was only later, when standing in the yard of her childhood home, that he broke down. They were looking at two pine trees, wrapped in Christmas garland, on either side of the yard. One faced the corner of their lot. Mama remarked, "Doesn't that look like Doris standing in the corner?" She was answered with the sound of a broken heart. When she turned, her father stood there, his frame bent over and head held in his hands. Tears seeped between his callused fingers and dropped onto the ground below. It was the only time Mama ever saw him cry.

Earl, my grampy, was a real man's man. In his younger days, Mama tells me, Earl would go out into the woods, trekking through knee-high snowdrifts, every year, two weeks before Christmas, in search of the perfect tree. I can see him now, bending at the waist, and eyeing the trunk, before slowly lifting his gaze upward to examine it for knots. The tree would have to be perfect—no bends, few knots, and it must have a nice slender top, perfect for placing a star atop. When he finds the perfect tree, he drags it barehanded out of the woods, through knee-high snowdrifts, and brings it home.

Mama leans back in her chair and points toward our driveway that is littered with cars, and tells me that her father didn't have a car, let alone three. I nod and try to imagine myself having to walk to work every day or walk my three children the seventeen mile trip to their doctor appointments. "How far did Grampy have to walk to get the Christmas tree home?" I ask out of curiosity. Mama smiles and tells me that he walked nearly two miles every Christmas to get the perfect tree. I try to picture how long two miles is, and I think of my Grampy dragging a pine tree home for the holidays.

I can see Grampy, dressed in blue jean overalls, tall black rubber boots, and a faded flannel coat. A wool cap sits on his head, cocked to one side, and a cigarette dangles precariously from his lips. His hands are callused and rough, but sure in their hold on the tree. Grampy swings his ax with commanding force and the tree gives way, groaning and creaking in defeat. With a jerk, he lifts the tree up over the snowdrifts and makes his way back to the road. He drops the tree onto its side and pulls it behind him with one hand, while the other holds his ax. With even steps and a steady pace, he drags it down a narrow dirt road, past the Bluff and turns onto Beach Street. The tree glides easily over the ice and snow encrusted street, leaving a trail of zigzag marks in the snow behind it.

I imagine him stopping once or twice to take a drag off of his cigarette. He blows smoke into the cold New Brunswick air, and it cools quickly and descends, before be taken away on a current of frosty air. His hands are cold, but he is much too manly and far too impatient to be bothered with gloves. He snuffs out his cigarette, and determined to savor what is left, he tucks it behind his reddened ear. By the time he makes it to First Street, his pace has slowed and despite the cold weather, his hat is off and coat opened.

I imagine Mama as a young girl looking out the kitchen window. She is kneeling precariously on the counter, trying to catch a glimpse of her father. When she spies him coming down the road, she calls out excitedly to her brothers and sisters. They all come running to the window. Each of them struggles for a spot on the five-foot long counter. The oldest brother, Wilfred, stands by the others and hikes six-year-old Doris onto his shoulders for a better view. By now Granny would have come to the kitchen, her washing disrupted by all

the commotion. She watches her children with amusement, while continuing to fold a towel that she has carried with her from the washroom.

Mama looks over her shoulder and sees her mother standing near the table with the folded towel in hand. She jumps off the counter and runs to her mother, embracing her and smiling. Granny kisses the top of her head and runs her hands playfully through her hair. "Your Granny was the least selfish person God ever laid upon this earth," Mama tells me. It is as if she can read my mind and knows that I am thinking of Granny. Mama smiles and tells me another story.

She remembers one particular afternoon when she was only ten. There were only a few slices of bread left in the breadbox. Mama and her siblings were hungry, so Granny carefully divided the bread among her children, hoping to satisfy them until she could get to the grocer's, but Mama and her brothers and sisters refused to eat until Granny ate a piece of the bread. When she tells me this, I think of how many times I have looked into the cupboard, staring at an array of canned goods, and complained about not having enough choices or have opted to throw bread ends away.

Sometimes the stories Mama tells me are warm and familiar, like the time Granny took all of the kids to the ocean. Mama grew up in Point du Chene, just a stone's throw from Parlee Beach. She remembers one time when Granny packed up all the children and headed out for an adventure. I can picture Granny walking with her troops lined up behind her in descending order, Wilfred at the front, followed by Margie, Mama, Doris, Jared, and finally, little Frank who is barely more than two. Granny turns and counts her children, taking on the role of both a schoolmaster and drill sergeant, making sure that all are present and accounted for. She picks up little Frank and

balances him on her sturdy hip, cupping her arm securely around his back. He leans into her, resting his head that is cropped with thick, curly brown hair, against her chest, and sucks his thumb.

Once they reach the beach, the children fall out of formation and make a run for the water. Little Frank's feet are already in motion, churning as if on a bicycle, before Granny even sets him down. He runs after the others, who are already splashing in the water. Granny chases behind, closing the distance. Mama and Margie take Frank by the hands, and they swing him back and forth, skimming his legs through the water. He squeals with delight and begs his sisters for more, and they oblige. Doris sits in the wet sand, letting the surf wash over her feet. She tilts her head toward the sun and leans back on her hands, striking a movie star pose. Jared fills a pail with water and dumps it over her head, breaking the fantasy. Doris leaps to her feet, screeching like an animal, and pursues her brother. When Doris catches up with Jared, the two grapple each other and tumble to the ground. They roll furiously across the dry sand with their wet bodies. Granny leans over them, and as she tries to pull them apart, little Frank yells, "Daddy, Daddy!" Doris and Jared, their wet bodies covered with sand, look like a couple of sugar cookies. They shove each other away and scramble to their feet.

Grampy makes his way across the beach with long, sure strides. His pants are rolled up to just below his knees and his work boots dangle by their laces held in his right hand. Mama, her brothers, and sisters all race over to Grampy. "I can still smell the salty ocean air," Mama says, bringing my imagination back into the kitchen. I close my eyes for a moment; I can smell the ocean too.

I Remember

Wanda Pothier-Hill

I remember the day
Breathing labored
Lungs failing
Like a deflated balloon

I remember the afternoon
The endless nightmare
Phone calls
Sister's face

I remember the moment
Her eyes met mine
You know
Don't you?

I remember this
A question answered
A single look
Tears fell

Mother, ghostly pale
Mother, where are you going?
Mother, falling away
Mother calling Mother

I remember the night

A fragile existence
My sister and I
Lie on a cold, tile floor

I remember Mother's eyes
Pray for a miracle?
Pray for an end?
Pray for an answer

Manic Muffins

Wanda Pothier-Hill

It was all over a lousy batch of muffins. Who would think that something so seemingly trivial could cause such an influx of emotions? The obituary might read, "Woman Dies From Emotional Pain Caused By Muffins." But they were chocolate chip. All I wanted was some muffins. I was hungry. Just once, just once, I wanted to beat my system. Wait too long and all's shot to hell. But there is too much oil, and not enough milk—hunger makes you hurry. I dump the whole batch into the trash, and watch it slide down the sides of the Glad Tall Kitchen bag, until it finally rests at the bottom of the barrel in a pile of waste. More money down the drain. I slam the white plastic mixing bowl down onto the counter, and force back my tears, but it is no use. I can't stop them.

He asks what is wrong. I don't want to answer him. He will just chalk it up to me being pregnant and tell me that my emotions are on the run. Instead I yell, "All I wanted is some fucking muffins! I'm hungry!" He shakes his head, whether to laugh or scorn, I don't know, don't care, don't wait to find out. I retreat to the bathroom and start the shower. I don't want him to see me cry. When the water is warm enough, I step inside and sit down on the shower floor, resting my head in my palms. Hot tears blend with warm water from the shower, making it impossible to tell one from another. I sniffle and wonder why God had given all the sappy emotions to women. I wash, trying to shrug off this whole thing as silly, but some

part of me refuses. Instead, everything comes pouring out—the muffins, my emotions—the whole damned day.

It started first thing this morning when my eight year old daughter suddenly had her usual attack of stomachaches/headaches/just can't breathe spells. She could say, "I can't breathe, I can't breathe, I can't breathe," over and over again in a single breath of air. It's funny how this always happens as soon as I say it's time for school! Late again. What else is new? Why can't she just go to school like a normal kid—without the tears, the arguing, and the drama? I hated to see her cry, but I knew she would be fine once she got in school. She always is.

Her six year old brother, on the other hand, doesn't hesitate to go to school. I never have a problem getting him out the door...but into the truck, well that's an all day project. He has to pick every icicle off of my front and back bumper of my truck, and then make a second circle around it, kicking all of the mud flaps and making sure all the ice has dislodged itself from my vehicle.

By the time I haul my children into my truck, my son is wound up like a top and my daughter is whimpering in the back, asking to please be able to go to school with *me* because *her* school is stupid. "*Cry all you want. It won't make a difference,*" I say, my patience fading fast. When we arrive at the school, I have to take her by the hand and walk her into the building as usual. As soon as we walk through the doors, my son breaks into a run down the hall—he is not capable of walking. I continue to the office, where I stop to write my children's name on the tardy list. My daughter continues to cry, and we are received with a collection of sympathetic sighs. Here we go again. She clings to me, and I have to physically pry her hands from around my waist before I can leave. I try

not to show any emotion because it'll only make her cry more. The nurse offers to walk her to class. I turn and head out.

It's nearing nine o'clock, and I have to get to school. It's a fifty-five mile drive, one-way, and I have very little gas in my tank. So I go to the bank, and while I'm waiting in the drive-thru line, it suddenly occurs to me that I do not have my husband's check with me. This sets off a fresh round of fists to the wheel and a string of R-rated words, not suitable for young audiences. I return home to find the check and head up town again. The clock is ticking and I'm still in Ashburnham, and I still need to gas up. When I get to the gas station and fuel up, I feel as though my wallet has been vacuumed clean; I am spending over sixty dollars a week in fuel money just to get to school.

All this is churning through my mind as I stand here naked in the shower with drops of water spilling across my breasts and over my belly, which is beginning to grow. I want to scream! It would be so nice to have just one perfect day — you know, the kind of day where the laundry is already done, supper is made, the children are washed and happy, and the husband is bare-chested and wearing really tight fitting jeans. But instead, he's in flannel pajamas, the laundry is spilling out of the hamper, the children are fighting over who should get in the shower first, and supper consists of Macaroni and Cheese. I don't want to get out of the shower. I don't want to hear my husband tell me that it's my hormones. I just want some muffins. I'm so hungry.

Outside of the shower, I know the air will be cold and unwelcoming, but my husband works hard and the oil bill is high enough from the winter chill. I shut off the water and begin to dry. That's when I hear the smoke detector sounding, and a smile of joy comes over my face. He's making muffins.

Empty Space

Wanda Pothier-Hill

Sometimes sadness folds over
Me like a dark cloak
Black velvet
Pressing against my face
I am
An empty room
In a crowded place
I wait
For the hand on my shoulder
Someone to say
It's okay
I feel what you feel

Eyemagination

Wanda Pothier-Hill

Palpating rhythm of the pen
Skipping across the page
Fantasy, fiction
Alive
Words bumping
Leaping from the page
I am the Creator
The Master
The Manipulator
The world rests
In the palm of my hand
Mine, all mine



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